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AUTHOR Craig, Ann Armstrong
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ABSTRACT

This curriculum consists of three interlocking elements: a teaching guide, a set of student readings, and a video. Designed for use in grades 9-12, this guide provides a brief but comprehensive introduction to all aspects of the refugee experience. The teaching guide provides a wide variety of discussion questions with suggestions for the classroom, writing, and community learning activities. A glossary of terms, a list of organizations that work on behalf of refugees, a bibliography, and refugee statistics accompany the text. The curriculum includes: (1) "Using This Curriculum"; (2) "Background Information"; (3) "Overview of Selected Refugee Situations: Excerpts from the World Refugee Survey 1994"; (4) "Suggested Activities"; (5) "The Refugee Experience, Study Maps"; and (6) "The Refugee Experience, Student Handouts." (EH)

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The Refugee Experience

Teaching Guide

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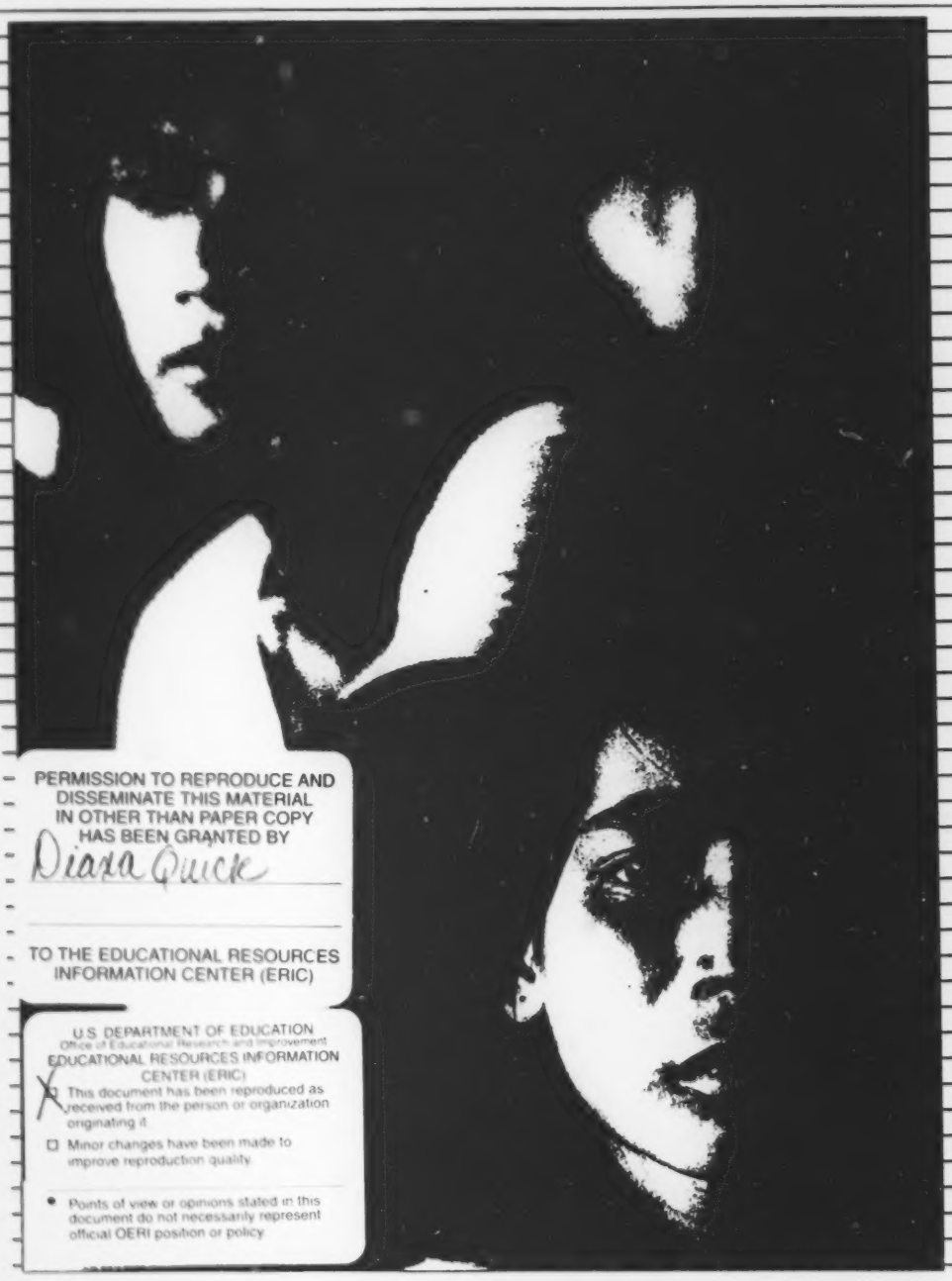

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Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

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The Refugee Experience
Teaching Guide

by Ann Armstrong Craig

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Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
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The Refugee Experience
Teaching Guide

Table of Contents

About the Women's Commission 4

To the Teacher 5

Using This Curriculum 6

- About the Teaching Guide 6
- About the Student Readings 6
- About the Video 7

Background Information 7

- The Reasons for Flight 7
- The Journey of Escape 10
- Who Takes Care of Refugees? 10
- Going Home at Last: Voluntary Repatriation 12
- Finding a New Home: Relocating Nearby or Far Away 13

Overview of Selected Refugee Situations: Excerpts from the *World Refugee Survey 1994* 14

Suggested Activities 17

- Classroom Activities 17
- Writing Activities 18
- Using the Video 19
- Community Learning Activities 20

Glossary of Terms 23

Organizations Working on Behalf of Refugees 25

A Refugee Bibliography 27

About the Women's Commission

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children is the only group in the United States dedicated to speaking out on behalf of the millions of women and children in the world uprooted by civil strife, war, persecution, and famine. It was founded in 1989 under the auspices of the International Rescue Committee, the leading U.S. private voluntary agency assisting refugees worldwide.

The goal of the Women's Commission is to improve the lives of refugee women and children through a vigorous and comprehensive program of public education and advocacy. Through the work of its diverse and expert membership, the Commission makes a tangible impact on the quality of life for refugee and displaced women and children. In addition to changes at the field level, the Commission has had a far-reaching impact on broad U.S. government and United Nations policies affecting the lives of uprooted women and children around the world.

The work of the Women's Commission begins with the refugees themselves. Women who are experts in various fields are sent on fact-finding missions to refugee sites around the world. These delegations include doctors and nurses, teachers and lawyers, social workers and business leaders, journalists and writers. Delegation members meet directly with refugee and displaced women to discuss their needs for education, skills training, basic health care, greater personal safety, and increased involvement in the direction and shaping of programs affecting them and their children. Among the countries visited by Commission delegates are: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, Hong Kong, Kenya, Laos, Liberia, Malawi, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Somalia, Southern Sudan, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Catherine O'Neill with a refugee woman and child on the Thai/Burma border.

On their return, members of the Women's Commission testify before Congress and present their findings to U.S. State Department policy makers and United Nations officials. Commission members regularly appear on television and radio, write articles and opinion pieces, brief the media, and give speeches to advocate on behalf of refugee and displaced women and children.

As part of its expanding public education program, the Women's Commission initiated the Schools Project in 1994 to share its experience with high school students across the United States. This project seeks to engage students in learning about the experiences of refugees and the related issue of human rights, and to enhance their education through experiential learning.

To the Teacher

As the world's refugee crises multiply, the news regularly carries pictures of families fleeing war-torn countries. Yet how much do most young Americans know of the true nature of these upheavals? Though familiar with the terms *refugee*,* *boat people*, and *ethnic cleansing*, they may not be sure of their exact meaning. Though they cannot help hearing about places like Bosnia and Rwanda, they may not be sure of their exact location. And though they may be aware that the United Nations and international aid organizations help care for people affected by war, they may not be sure exactly how.

More important, they may have no sense at all of how the various pieces of the picture fit together, and of how profoundly the subject of refugees involves the issue of human rights.

Few subjects are as pivotal to understanding the way the world works—on a personal, national, and international level—as the refugee experience. On a personal level, it offers an electrifying lesson in the connection between world events and ordinary human lives. On an international level, it offers a vivid introduction to such issues as ethnic conflict and the abuse of human rights; the devastating effects of powerlessness, particularly for the world's women; the part played by the media in directing our attention to particular problems; the reluctance of the "have" nations to share their abundance with the "have-nots"; and the expanding role of the UN in caring for those victimized by strife.

Understanding the refugee experience can add depth and dimension to the study of history and geography, current affairs and civics, language arts and cultural diversity. In each context it can provide a resonant touchstone for appreciating the democratic process and the importance of each person's role as a caring citizen of the global community.

In the belief that informed awareness is the key to tolerance and, ultimately, to enlightened action, this curriculum is designed:

1. To give students an insight into a complex global problem, with an emphasis on its human dimensions and the universality of the human experience.

2. To give students the tools to understand the various steps of the refugee experience so that they can better interpret the refugee situations they see and read about in the media.

3. To give students a feel for the interplay among the various forces at work in today's world and their impact on real people's lives.

4. To empower students through an increased understanding of the way these forces and structures interface, and to encourage them to be informed and active citizens.

5. Finally, and above all, to give students a heightened awareness of the meaning of human rights, an awareness that they can take with them into the future as they seek to understand their changing world.

UNHCR/B.Press

* Words in italics appear in the Glossary of Terms, pages 23-24.

Using This Curriculum

Designed for use in grades 9 through 12, this curriculum consists of three interlocking elements: a teaching guide, a set of student readings, and a video.

About the Teaching Guide

To help you present this compelling subject, we provide a brief but comprehensive introduction to all aspects of the refugee experience in the following pages. This introduction parallels the step-by-step presentation of the subject found in the introductions to the student readings and highlights the aspects of the refugee journey common to refugees all over the world.

If you are interested in taking a closer look at specific refugee situations, there is an excellent resource readily available. It is the *World Refugee Survey*, published each spring by the U.S. Committee for Refugees. Concise and very readable, it provides a handy survey of refugee situations, region by region and country by country. To give you some idea of its contents, we've included excerpts from its 1994 coverage of Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Mozambique on pages 14-16. (For a copy of the *Survey*, contact the U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20036; it is $10 plus $4 for postage and handling.)

Another excellent source of information about refugee issues and a comprehensive look at the work being done on refugees' behalf is *The State of the World's Refugees, 1993: The Challenge of Protection*, published by Penguin Books. This report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is available in paperback from bookstores.

To supplement the questions accompanying the student readings, the Teaching Guide provides a wide variety of suggestions for classroom, writing, and community learning activities. These are followed by a glossary of terms, a list of organizations that work on behalf of refugees, a bibliography, and refugee statistics. The bibliography contains abundant resources, ranging from films and magazines to personal narratives and fiction, curriculas and background sources.

About the Student Readings

This part of the package offers ten sets of thematic readings illustrating the various steps in the refugee journey, from flight to repatriation or resettlement. A final set of readings explores the connection between human rights and refugee crises. Many of these selections are vivid first-person accounts by refugees themselves. Here, in the words of real men and women, your students will find the heart of the refugee experience. Presented in separate, reproducible units and preceded by a set of maps, the readings are grouped as follows:

1. Flight: How People Become Refugees
2. Life in Refugee Camps
3. Host Countries: Bearing the Burden
4. Who Helps Protect and Care for Refugees?
5. The Displaced: Still in Danger
6. Repatriation Means Going Home
7. Facing New Challenges at Home
8. Seeking Asylum Far from Home
9. When the Answer is No
10. Stories of Resettlement
11. Refugees and Human Rights

Each set of readings is accompanied by a brief introduction that parallels the material in your guide. Each is followed by several questions for further thought and discussion. The various groups of readings are designed to be used in sequence, but may be used in whatever order or combination you choose. (You may, for example, feel you only have time to use one.)

About the Video

Our accompanying video, *The Refugee Experience*, focuses on the special hardships and challenges facing refugees. For best effect, you may want to use the video at the end of your sequence of readings and lessons, when your students have begun to understand the overall picture of refugee issues. Alternatively, after seeing the video yourself, you may want to use it as a way of engaging your students' interest before you do any classroom work on the subject.

Background Information

The Reasons for Flight

Refugees are the human face of momentous changes sweeping the globe. For the first time in history, most of the wars being fought in the world are within nations instead of between them. The resulting civil strife and chaos have resulted in millions of ordinary people being suddenly uprooted. They may or may not hold any political beliefs; their "crime" is often simply belonging to the wrong ethnic or religious group or living in disputed territory. Whatever the reason, they find themselves under attack—persecuted, brutalized, and living in terror. One day they realize they no longer have a choice: they must leave their homes and everything they own and flee for their lives.

In doing so, they join a host of others: 19 million people who, by crossing an international border to find safety, have officially become *refugees*, and 24 million others who, by fleeing their communities but being unable or reluctant to leave their countries, have become *internally displaced* people.

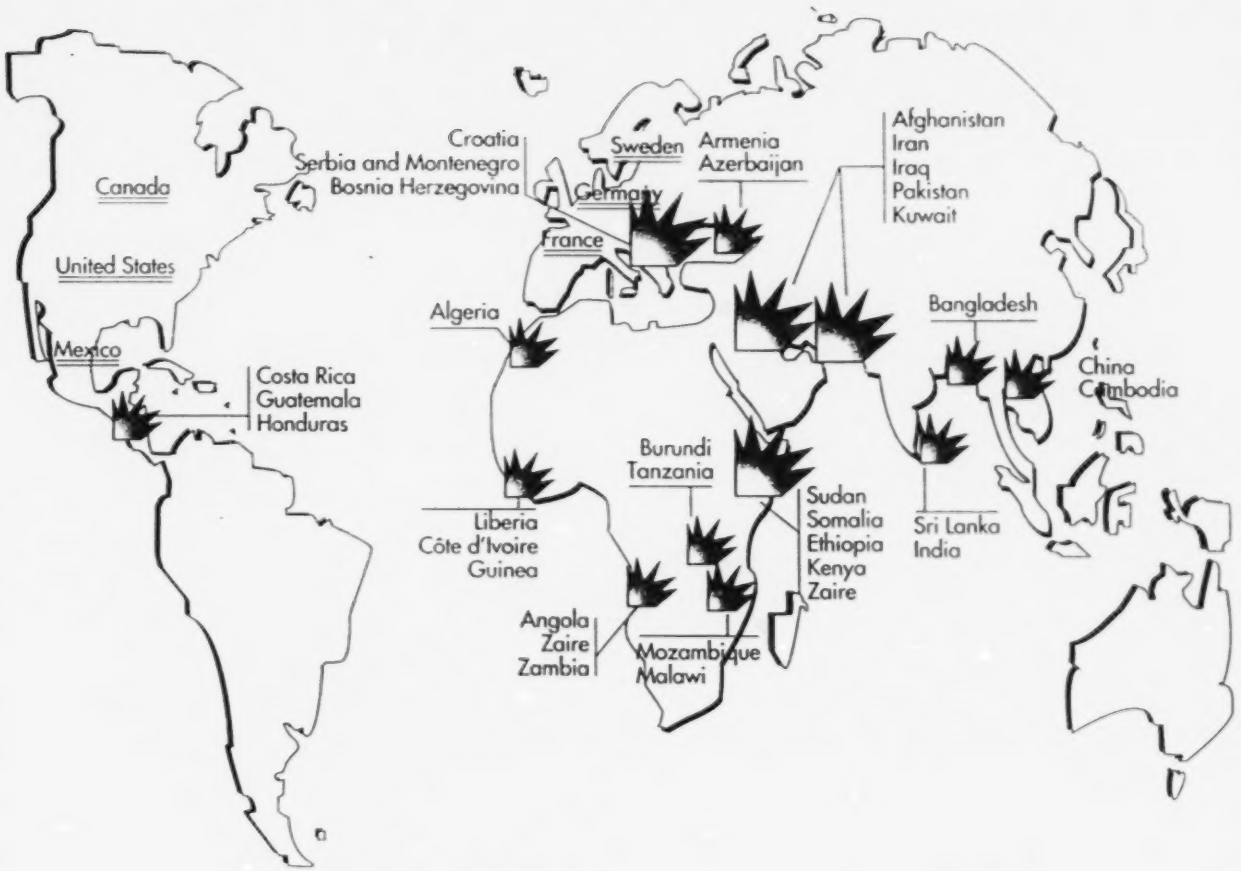
Of course there have always been refugees, but by 1992 the number was growing at the rate of some 10,000 a day. In 1970 there were just 2.5 million refugees in the world. Today, there are nearly ten times that many— and fully 80 percent of them are women and children.

Ironically, the close of the Cold War has had a lot to do with the upsurge of refugees. While it has created the opportunity for ending certain long-standing conflicts around the world, it has also unleashed the demons of internal conflict in many nations. As Cold War tensions have eased and the superpowers have relaxed their grip on the smaller nations within their influence, ethnic tensions, rivalries, and hatreds have risen to the surface. The same process that we see at work in the former Yugoslavia and parts of the old Soviet Union is also at work in countries throughout Asia and Africa.

Fragile governments, unable to subdue warring factions and often involved in the conflict themselves, are unable or unwilling to protect their own citizens. To make matters worse, many small countries are awash in weapons, another legacy of the Cold War years. The combination of weak or abusive governments and an endless supply of arms almost inevitably leads to the violation of human rights on a massive scale. Persecution, imprisonment, torture, rape, murder, and destruction can become commonplace. Since the war in Bosnia, the term for an especially lethal form of persecution has entered our vocabulary: *ethnic cleansing*, the use of a systematic campaign of terror to drive members of a particular ethnic minority out of a region. Ethnic cleansing has also occurred in other conflicts around the world.

An apparently natural disaster like widespread famine can drive whole communities from their lands and homes just as surely as any violence, chaos, or terror. But here again, human beings are often to blame. The severe famines that have hit parts of Africa in recent years have, to a large extent, been the result of ongoing civil wars that have interrupted the growing and distribution of food. The withholding of food supplies has also been used as a weapon of war in many instances. Just as sinister, because also deliberate, has been the draining of the marshlands in southern Iraq. This region was the traditional home of the Marsh Arabs, a group that has opposed Saddam Hussein's rule. In retaliation, Hussein has built a huge canal to

Refugees Around the World



This map indicates zones (marked with a flash) in which conflicts have engendered a massive flow of refugees. The countries cited for each of these conflicts were sheltering at least 100,000 refugees on January 1, 1993. The countries with a double underline are those harboring at least as many people, even though they have no common frontier with a country or countries at war or torn by civil strife. (Source: UNESCO Sources, No. 49, July–August 1993.)

SELECTED LIST OF SIGNIFICANT POPULATIONS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED CIVILIANS

(as of December 31, 1992)

Table 3 identifies selected countries in which substantial numbers of people have been displaced within their homelands as a result of human conflict or forced relocations. Although they share many characteristics with refugees who cross international borders, they are generally not eligible for international refugee assistance. Because information on internal displacement is fragmentary, this table presents only reported estimates, and no total is provided. It is important to note that even this selected list includes 24 million people, and that the total number of internally displaced civilians is undoubtedly much higher.

Sudan	5,000,000	Rwanda	350,000
South Africa	4,100,000	Croatia	340,000
Mozambique	3,500,000	Colombia	300,000
Somalia	2,000,000	India	280,000
Philippines	1,000,000	Cyprus	265,000
Angola	900,000	Azerbaijan	216,000
Bosnia and Hercegovina	740,000	Sierra Leone	200,000
Ethiopia/Eritrea	600,000	Cambodia	199,000
Liberia	600,000	El Salvador	154,000
Sri Lanka	600,000	Guatemala	150,000
Afghanistan	530,000	Zaire	100,000
Burma	500,000–1,000,000	Kenya	45,000
Peru	500,000	Turkey	30,000
Iraq	400,000	Moldova	20,000
Lebanon	400,000	Georgia	15,000
Tajikistan	400,000		

Source: *World Refugee Survey 1994*. Reprinted with permission of the U.S. Committee for Refugees.

PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF THE WORLD'S REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

(as of December 31, 1992)

This chart is a retabulation of Table 1. It identifies countries that have generated the greatest number of the world's refugees. Counts may understate the total number of refugees from a given country, as asylum states do not always specify countries of refugees' origin. This table does not include populations considered to be in refugee-like circumstances listed in Table 2, many of whom are also refugees. Also, it does not include populations who left their countries as refugees or in refugee-like circumstances, but who have been offered permanent resettlement and status in another country. Examples include 44,336 Vietnamese who were resettled in the United States and 125,355 members of religious minorities who departed the former Soviet Union for Israel and the United States in 1992.

Afghanistan	4,286,000*	Iraq	125,900
Palestinians	2,658,000	Georgia	130,000
Former Yugoslavia[1]	1,767,800*	China (Tibet)	128,000
Mozambique	1,725,000*	Bhutan	95,400*
Somalia	864,800*	Vietnam	89,900
Ethiopia/Eritrea	834,800	Mali	81,000
Liberia	599,200*	Moldova	80,000*
Angola	404,200	Zaire	66,900
Azerbaijan	350,000*	Iran	65,400
Burma	333,700*	Mauritania	65,000
Sudan	263,000	Tajikistan	52,000
Armenia	202,000*	Bangladesh	50,000*
Rwanda	201,500*	Guatemala	45,750
Sierra Leone	200,000*	Laos	43,300
Burundi	184,000	Nicaragua	30,850
Sri Lanka	181,000	Chad	24,000*
Western Sahara	165,000*	El Salvador	22,800
Cambodia	148,600	Senegal	15,000

* Indicates that sources vary widely in number reported.

[1] Where possible, USCR has identified "former Yugoslavs" by republic of origin. They include: Bosnia and Hercegovina—940,000; Croatia—350,000; Serbia/Montenegro—75,000; Other/unspecified—402,800.

Source: *World Refugee Survey 1994*. Reprinted with permission of the U.S. Committee for Refugees.

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drain away the water they depend on for their way of life and livelihood, destroying their habitat and forcing them to flee their homes.

The Journey of Escape

Many refugees leave their country on a moment's notice—just before their village is obliterated by bombs or just after their homes have been destroyed. By the time they leave, they may have suffered all kinds of terror and torment. They may have been forced to watch as loved ones were tortured, raped, or killed. One or more members of the family may have been *"disappeared"*—taken away, never to be seen again, without cause and without explanation. But whether they are actually able to leave the country as refugees, or have to remain somewhere within it as internally displaced people, their journey of escape is likely to be every bit as traumatic as the events that led up to it.

Many thousands of Vietnamese refugees were so desperate to escape their country after the end of the Vietnam war that they took to the sea in rickety, overcrowded boats without enough food or water. Thousands of Haitians have done the same thing in recent years to escape oppression in their island country. Many such boat people have drowned, been callously turned back when they attempted to land on foreign shores, or, in the case of the Vietnamese, fallen prey to vicious pirate gangs who roamed the seas, looting, raping, and murdering the hapless voyagers at will.

Similar roving gangs—of soldiers, guerrilla fighters, or simply armed thugs—lie in wait for refugees attempting to escape across deserts and rivers, over mountains, through jungles, or across areas planted with land mines. It is hardest on women, who in many cases make the journey without father, husband, or brother. Now, suddenly, with their male relatives dead, missing, or away fighting, these women are facing the worst that life can bring—alone. At every point along the way, from the village or city they have fled to the refugee camp they eventually reach, they are vulnerable to rape and other forms of physical abuse.

Usually, they have had only time enough to gather up their children and older family members. Seldom do they settle immediately into one place in the land of exile. As they move about, the first home they can provide for themselves is often no more than a blanket or quilt raised on sticks. Food and water are scarce, and medical help desperately needed because such journeys take their highest toll on the weakest members of the family, the very young and the very old. When refugees gather in one place in large numbers, chaos defies any quest for order.

Who Takes Care of Refugees?

Once a place of safety has been found, internally displaced or refugee families enter a new phase of their experience, waiting—until it is safe to go home, or until a place is found for them to resettle in permanently. This wait—usually endured in camps—can take many months or years. Children born in exile have grown to be teenagers still living in refugee camps, knowing nothing of their native lands.

Refugee camps can be grim places. Imagine row after row of overcrowded, windowless huts, or an endless sea of tents in a field of mud, or stacks of "living spaces" six feet by eight feet in size, piled three high like human bookshelves. Sometimes these conditions exist because the *host country*, the neighboring or nearby nation sheltering the refugees, is too poor itself to provide more than minimal food and protection from the elements. Sometimes, too, such conditions occur because the neighboring country wants to discourage any more refugees from seeking shelter there. It should be said, however, that poor as they are—and most of the countries that provide refuge are among the world's least developed nations—many host countries have shown a long-term level of generosity that puts the rest of the world to shame.

UNHCR/K. Gangler

But beyond the help offered by host countries, the care and protection of refugees has long been the special charge of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), established in 1951. No other UN agency has direct responsibility for meeting refugees' basic needs protecting them and seeking permanent solutions to their problems.

It is important to note that until recently UNHCR assistance has been limited to those who, fearing for their safety, have crossed an international border to seek refuge. The reason for this lies in the 1951 UN *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and the 1967 *Protocol* that followed it. According to these agreements, a refugee is defined as any person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unwilling or unable to avail himself of the protection of that country."

This definition, designed to ensure that the UN will respect all individual nations' authority within their own borders, has remained the essential litmus test of a refugee ever since. Unfortunately, it has also meant that many internally displaced people have been ineligible for international aid and protection. In recent years, however, the wholesale breakdown of certain states—Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, in particular—has created opportunities for the agency to broaden its mission to include those uprooted by civil strife but still within their own countries. UNHCR can assist the internally displaced when the government in question and/or the UN requests its help.

Refugees around the world who have crossed an international border in search of safety are entitled to UNHCR's help immediately, provided the host country requests it (and most do). At this point, UNHCR can organize emergency assistance to meet the refugees' basic needs with food, tents, and blankets, wells and sanitation facilities, medicine and health care. And, from the outset, UNHCR works to find long-term solutions to refugees' most basic need of all: a safe place to live after the refugee camp.

UNHCR is not alone in providing care. Refugee assistance in the form of food, medicine, public health, education, skills-training, and social services is also provided by many international aid organizations. (Indeed, many of these groups exist for the express purpose of helping refugees.) Some

of these *nongovernmental organizations*, or *NGOs*, as they are also known, may already be familiar to you—the International Rescue Committee, CARE, Oxfam, Save the Children and the International Red Cross, for example. But there are hundreds more around the globe working independently to monitor human rights and warn of impending crises, to save lives and provide relief as emergencies develop, and to assist returning refugees by accompanying them home and helping them rebuild.

Another role played by NGOs working on behalf of refugees is that of *advocate*. By awakening public opinion, the news media, and politicians to refugee issues, these NGOs seek to influence the policy decisions of individual nations and the international community. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children is one such advocacy group. A description of its work appears at the beginning of this guide.

Going Home at Last: Voluntary Repatriation

Parallel to its role in providing refugees with material aid and protection, UNHCR focuses on finding permanent answers to their need for a real home. From the beginning, the goal is to enable refugees to return to a normal life, either back in their own country, in the host country, or in a third country. These three possibilities are known as the *durable solutions* to the refugee dilemma.

The best of the durable solutions, of course, is *voluntary repatriation*—returning to the land of one's birth, to a familiar landscape and climate, culture and lifestyle. To make this possible, UNHCR works to bring about the conditions necessary for a safe return, including guarantees by the home government to respect the returnees' rights as citizens and permission for UNHCR to monitor their treatment back in their homeland. The agency also tries to ensure that refugees are fully informed about conditions in their country before they decide to go home. When they do make that decision, UNHCR often facilitates their return by providing them with transportation, as well as seeds, tools, and other materials to help them get started. In cooperation with NGOs, it also helps design and set up projects to help them rebuild the war-ravaged areas they are returning to.

Ideally, refugees return home only when it is completely safe for them to do so. In reality, either because they see little chance of peace in their homeland for a long time, or because conditions in exile are so difficult, or because they're afraid their children are losing their cultural identity, they often return before peace is achieved. This has been the case in Guatemala, where human rights are still being violated, and in Afghanistan, where fighting between rival groups has become so violent that thousands of repatriated refugees are again seeking *asylum*.

Returning home generally means facing devastation on a monumental scale. Homes and villages, fields and farms, schools and hospitals, roads and bridges all lie in ruins. Water, sewer, and electrical systems have been knocked out; often, everything must be started again from scratch. Sometimes there is not enough safe land to go round—or returnees find that someone else is living on their land.

One of the greatest dangers facing returnees is the presence of land mines. Planted by all the warring factions in countries around the world, 80 to 100 million of them remain hidden just below the earth's surface awaiting victims. As the report *Land Mines in Cambodia* (see bibliography) has pointed out, mines are "blind weapons that cannot distinguish between the footfall of a soldier or that of an old woman gathering wood. They recognize no ceasefire, and long after the fighting has stopped, they can maim or kill the children and grandchildren of the soldiers who laid them." Unfortunately, demining any area is extremely difficult and dangerous work. It is also extremely costly and time-consuming. So, in country after country, refugees and their children are returning home only to face the ever-present danger of stepping on a hidden mine. Tragically, many returnees have become amputees.

Nonetheless, refugees are sometimes so anxious to go home that they are willing to brave anything, preferring the challenges and satisfactions of being back in their own land to the indignities and dependence, frustration and boredom, waste and sadness that so often characterize camp life.

There is another kind of repatriation that should be mentioned, and that is *forced repatriation*. Generally, sending refugees back to their country of origin against their will is against the principles of international law and the UN conventions on the treatment of refugees. Nonetheless, there have been cases where government concern about the alleged abuse of refugee status by people emigrating for economic reasons has led to their being forcibly detained or returned.

In this connection, it is very important that students understand the difference between *refugees* and *economic migrants*. Refugees are forced to seek permanent asylum when they cannot, or are reluctant to, return to their homeland because of a well-founded fear of persecution. Economic migrants can freely choose to emigrate solely because they wish to improve their way of life.

Finding a New Home: Relocating Nearby or Far Away

The second and third of the durable solutions involve relocation outside one's own country. *Local integration* means resettling permanently in the host country. In time, many of the refugees who do this become full citizens of the country and enjoy all the legal rights and protection that go with citizenship there.

Resettlement means moving from the host country to a third country on a permanent basis. For both refugees and the world community, this is the least desirable of the durable solutions. For refugees, it means leaving everything familiar behind. Even the host country probably has a climate, language, culture, and way of life closer to their own than will their new land. Once again they must leave behind their friends and usually some of their family as they set off for an uncertain future in a faraway place with no guarantee of a hospitable welcome.

In many countries refugees have become an increasingly unwelcome burden. Throughout Western Europe, the lasting economic recession and scarcity of jobs have fueled a growing resentment of foreign newcomers. The result has been a tightening of restrictions relating to the admission of refugees throughout Europe. Fears of being overwhelmed by a rising tide of refugees have led to similar proposals in the United States and Canada. Yet even now the percentage of refugees who are granted asylum in third countries is astonishingly small—less than 1 percent of all the worlds refugees.

What is it like to be among the few who are granted asylum, who do resettle far from home and become "strangers in a strange land"? Imagine suddenly being transported to a place where you do not speak the language, cannot read the street signs, and must depend on others to help you find work and housing. Imagine still grieving and being homesick for all you have left behind, but having to devote your every effort to keeping your family together and starting your life all over again.

The wonder of it is that so many refugees have overcome all these obstacles to remake their lives and give back to their new countries so much more than they have received.

Overview of Selected Refugee Situations: Excerpts from the *World Refugee Survey 1994*

Below are excerpts from the *World Refugee Survey*'s 1994 refugee reports for Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Mozambique. Like all the *Survey*'s country reports, these focus on the history and current status of specific refugee situations.

Afghanistan

An estimated 964,000 Afghan refugees repatriated from Iran and Pakistan during 1993 (358,800 from Pakistan; 337,500 from Iran with UNHCR assistance; and 268,000 from Iran without UNHCR assistance, according to the government of Iran). At the same time, continued fighting among rival *mujahedin* factions, particularly in and around Kabul, the Afghan capital, led some 28,000 Afghans to flee to Pakistan and hundreds of thousands more Afghans to become at least temporarily displaced within Afghanistan.

At the end of 1993, an estimated 3.38 million Afghan refugees were still living in Iran and Pakistan (1.9 million in Iran; 1.48 million in Pakistan). Ironically, beginning in November 1992, Afghanistan became host to an estimated 60,000 Tajik refugees, some 25,000 of whom repatriated during 1993.

The bloody battle for power continued in Kabul, with major episodes of fighting occurring at intervals throughout the year. In mid-May, more than 1,000 people died during a nine-day period. The fighting has left the city, which was largely unaffected during the decade-long civil war, in ruins. Thousands were killed and many thousands more wounded as a result of indiscriminate shelling; property was deliberately destroyed or looted; and human rights abuses, including rape, were widespread.

Politically, cease-fires came and went, as did alliances between different *mujahedin* groups. There was a government of sorts, but, because it was comprised of members of warring factions, it did little governing in Kabul, and exercised virtually no authority outside the capital. Power in the rest of Afghanistan was in the hands of local warlords, generally allied with the various *mujahedin* factions, who exerted total control over their fiefdoms.

Relief efforts on behalf of returnees, displaced persons, and others at risk depended on relief groups negotiating with local warlords, and were often interrupted as different groups seized control of the roads connecting key towns. A number of international and local relief workers were killed in Afghanistan during the year, and at various times relief personnel were evacuated from different areas due to the high level of insecurity.

Lack of funds also impeded relief and rehabilitation for all Afghans, including returnees, the displaced, and others affected by the decade-long conflict. Donor governments, which have demonstrated little interest in Afghanistan since the end of the Cold War, responded poorly to UN appeals for aid to Afghans. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA), UNHCR, and NGOs involved in relief and development all experienced financial crises and had to curtail programs. Nevertheless, a number of aid projects benefitting returnees and other vulnerable groups, for example mineclearing, proceeded in many areas of the country, and in several districts returnees were successfully rebuilding homes and planting their fields.

Afghans applying for asylum in the West were frequently rejected. Germany rejected 3,000 of 3,500 claims adjudicated between January and August, 1993, though Bonn has allowed the rejected applicants to remain temporarily. . . .

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Cambodia

More than 367,500 Cambodians repatriated from Thailand between April 1992 and May 1993. Many of the 160,000 who were internally displaced at the start of the year also returned to their homes, while some 30,000 ethnic Vietnamese Cambodians fled to Vietnam, where they joined 5,100 Cambodian refugees, mostly ethnic Chinese, who have lived there since the late 1970s. . . . At the end of 1993, an estimated 95,000 Cambodians remained internally displaced.

Cambodian Repatriation The repatriation of Cambodian refugees in Thailand, which was organized by UNHCR, was an integral part of the United Nations' effort to assist Cambodia to elect a national assembly, draft a new constitution, and usher in a new government in Phnom Penh. The UN's involvement in Cambodia was directed by the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), whose 18-month peacekeeping mission involved 22,000 soldiers and civilians and cost in excess of $2 billion. It was the largest and most expensive peacekeeping mission in the history of the United Nations. UNHCR and the World Food Program (WFP) alone spent $122 million on the repatriation. . . .

At the end of 1993, conflict between the Khmer Rouge and the Cambodian government continued to generate refugees and displaced persons. Several thousand became internally displaced in the last few months of 1993, and hundreds were perched along the Thai-Cambodian border, waiting to cross into Thailand if the fighting came too near.

During the initial months of the repatriation, which began in April 1992, only some 6,000 refugees repatriated per month. Despite frequent cease-fire violations and growing political and ethnic violence in Cambodia, the pace of repatriation escalated rapidly. By the end of the operation, nearly 40,000 refugees were repatriating per month. Besides the 362,200 Cambodians who repatriated on the UNHCR convoys (all but 9,000 of them in time to vote in the May election), another 5,300 Cambodians returned home spontaneously and registered as returnees with UNHCR in Cambodia. The total of those who repatriated with UNHCR assistance or who registered with UNHCR upon return was 367,500. . . .

Assistance. . .By the end of August 1992, nearly 90 percent of all returnee families were receiving a cash and food package at the time of their repatriation. This package had the effect of encouraging family reunification, because returnees tended to seek out and settle with relatives who had not left Cambodia and still had land. The cash and year-long supply of food also made it easier for returnees to return to their families, since they were not coming empty-handed and would not be perceived, at least in the short-term, as a burden.

As the last convoys moved across the border in April and May 1993, however, the 400 days of UN food rations were coming to an end for the earliest arrivals of 1992. By the end of December, more than 190,000 returnees were on their own. Many had yet to find a source of sustainable income and some were deeply worried about how they would survive.

WFP's (the World Food Program's) approach to food aid to returnees whose 400-day rations ended was firm but not unbending. The agency said that the most vulnerable could, if necessary, continue to be assisted for a time through other WFP food aid programs operating in the country, for example those for internally displaced persons, vulnerable groups, and demobilized soldiers, or food-for-work projects.

In 1993, WFP projected an outlay of $6.1 million to provide this population with basic food rations. With an additional $3.6 million, it expected to be able to provide reintegration assistance in the areas of agriculture, health, sanitation, water, shelter, mine clearing and awareness, and income generation.

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Mozambique

At the end of 1993, about 1.3 million Mozambicans were refugees in neighboring countries, and up to 2 million persons were internally displaced within Mozambique. . . .

1993—Mozambique's first full year of peace after 16 years of brutal internal war—marked the beginning of what is expected to be the most massive repatriation ever seen in Africa. Some 500,000 Mozambican refugees repatriated during the year, and an estimated 2 million internally displaced—about half of the total at the beginning of the year—returned to their homes to begin the arduous process of rebuilding their shattered nation. . . .

Fragile Peace Process For 16 years, the government of Mozambique battled against a secretive army of Mozambican rebels known as the Mozambican National Resistance, or "Renamo." Renamo earned international notoriety as the "Khmer Rouge of Africa" because of its brutality against the civilian population and its wanton destruction of factories, schools, health clinics, roads, and railways.

Renamo and the government signed a peace agreement in late 1992 calling for troop disarmament by April 1993 and national elections by October 1993. The United Nations agreed to provide up to 7,500 peacekeeping troops. . . .

Refugee Repatriation. . . The sheer volume of potential returnees was one of several factors that made Mozambique's repatriation program uniquely difficult. Refugees were returning from an unprecedented six asylum countries and were attempting to resettle in areas only slowly recovering from Mozambique's worst drought of the century.

A majority of Renamo and government forces remained armed throughout the year and posed a potential danger to civilians. The country's poor roads and the huge number of land mines remaining from the war hampered relief shipments and endangered returnees as well as relief workers. At least ten persons per week, on average, suffered injuries from land mines throughout the year. . . .

Unfavorable conditions in Mozambique did not deter some 200,000 refugees from repatriating on their own by May. An estimated 400,000 had returned by September, and 500,000 by the end of the year. Many returnees explained that they were eager to restart their lives, to plant crops, and to escape the dependency common in refugee camps. Others reportedly returned quickly to avoid disputes over land tenure after so many years of absence. . . .

Internally Displaced and "Vulnerable Groups"
At least half of Mozambique's estimated 4 million internally displaced persons returned home during 1993.

The exact number of persons internally displaced by the war was unknown because many regions remained inaccessible to government and international officials. Many Mozambicans, unable to reach the safety of neighboring countries during the conflict, fled to overcrowded, squalid settlements in militarily protected areas such as the outskirts of the capital, Maputo, or along the country's railway lines.

Living conditions and services available in the settlements were often worse than in refugee camps outside the country. Conditions were even more abysmal for tens of thousands of displaced persons who were trapped in Renamo-controlled zones during the war, cut off from all outside assistance for years. . . .

Mozambique's returning refugees and internally displaced populations included large numbers of so-called "vulnerable groups" with special assistance needs: unaccompanied children, single parents, widows, elderly, disabled, and psychologically traumatized individuals.

An estimated 250,000 or more children were orphaned or separated from their parents during the war. Studies suggested that approximately 150,000 uprooted Mozambicans—primarily women—were single parents. The country's uprooted population included some half-million elderly and more than 15,000 disabled, according to some estimates.

Social workers feared that many vulnerable groups might receive less assistance after the war than they received in camps during the war, due to the limited capacity of the Mozambican government and the remote locations where many persons intended to resettle.

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Suggested Activities

The following activities are suggestions only.

Classroom Activities

1. Exploring the Family Tree

A good place to begin may be with the experience of your own students and their families. America has been a haven for wave after wave of refugees, starting with the early English colonists fleeing religious persecution, and continuing with the men and women who escaped from slavery on the Underground Railroad, the Jews who fled from pogroms in Russia and from the Nazi Holocaust, the political dissidents escaping Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the Vietnamese boat people and others fleeing the upheavals in Southeast Asia, and the Central Americans who have sought safe haven from civil strife and repression.

Some of your students may actually be refugees. Others may be the sons, daughters, or grandchildren of refugees. You may want to encourage them to share their stories or those of their families with the class. To help them get started, you can ask them to create a family tree going as far back as they can—to their great grandparents if possible. As they seek to fill in the blanks, they may find themselves learning some very important information from members of their extended family. What they learn can provide the basis for classroom discussion or writing assignments.

2. For Discussion and Debate

When students have read some of the selections, ask them to discuss the pros and cons of the issues they feel most strongly about. Possible topics might include such questions as:

• Should the international community step in to stop widespread human rights abuses in individual countries? Why or why not?

• Should there be an international ban on the manufacture and sale of land mines? Why or why not?

• Should the humanitarian work of the United Nations, at present severely underfunded, be supported by some innovative new means? (One suggestion has been a universal tax on all international air travel.)

• Should more refugees be granted asylum by the democracies of the developed world? Why or why not?

3. Media Watch

Ask the class as a whole or individual groups within it to choose a particular refugee crisis to follow in the media as *their* special concern. Have them make regular reports on it, updating the rest of the class as the situation changes. Using newspaper and magazine articles and photographs, ask them to document their work as they go along by putting together a scrapbook or bulletin board presentation. (For additional materials—background and updates—they can contact UNHCR, 1718 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20009, and/or the U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, D.C., 20036. Also see our bibliography for a list of very interesting and readable free magazines and regular information bulletins on current refugee crises.)

4. Role-Playing

A. Have students role-play a situation of increasing danger in which members of a family, their neighbors, and friends debate whether or not to give up their homes and seek refuge across the border. Some—one group of neighbors, for instance, or the grandparents—are in favor of "waiting it out." Others believe that flight is their only real hope of safety. If the family decides to flee, how do the other members of the family and those who choose to stay behind feel about it? What doubts, fears, and anguish does the fleeing family feel?

B. Have students role-play any of the situations such a family might encounter in their journey:

• Bargaining for their lives with a group of armed men intent on robbing and killing them; getting past the guards at the border; meeting other refugees and taking shelter at a refugee camp; encountering welcome or hostility from citizens of the host country

• Adjusting to their new lives in the camp (is it safe for everyone? do they have decent housing? nutrition? health care? are there classes for their children? can they learn new skills and practice old crafts there?); talking to UNHCR representatives about their chances for repatriation or resettlement; learning to keep hope alive for the future

• Going home at last and coping with a variety of challenges, including the destruction of their home and village, a scarcity of safe land and water, the presence of land mines, etc.

• Setting off on a desperate search for asylum by plane or boat; becoming one of the lucky few to be allowed to resettle in a far-off land; adjusting to the new language, customs, and lifestyle of that new country

5. Who Meets the Criteria?

Using the basic definition of a refugee—one who, "owing to a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality—" ask students to judge the following brief case histories and determine which meet the necessary criteria for being granted political asylum:

(a) A Russian miner who wants to escape the grinding poverty of his region for a better life in the United States

(b) A Sudanese journalist who is fleeing her country after being threatened because of newspaper articles she has written

(c) An ailing Ghanian teacher who wants to move to Ohio to live with her son and daughter-in-law

(d) Members of an Iranian family who have left their country after being forced to convert to another religion

(e) An Indian doctor who has been offered a position at a New York hospital

(f) A young Vietnamese widow who seeks a new life for her children in the United States with distant relatives

(g) Members of a Guatemalan family who witnessed the massacre of their entire village by government soldiers

(h) A Chinese student who has been in hiding since he took part in the Democracy Movement of 1989

Answers: (a), (c), (e), and (f) do not qualify because they do not fit the definition of a refugee.

Writing Activities

1. Letter-Writing Campaign

Have students brainstorm possible writing activities that would express their feelings about some aspect of the refugee problem—a letter to a relief organization, a letter to the editor of a newspaper, or a letter to an elected official, for example. (Letters to U.S. senators and congresspeople should be sent to the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20510 or Washington, D.C. 20515, respectively; letters to the President should be sent to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20500.) Have them share ideas and write first drafts. Follow up with writing conferences, revisions, editing, and sharing with the class before mailing out.

2. Getting the News Out

Invite students to write a column for the school newspaper based on their Media Watch work. Or, if

there is sufficient interest, encourage them to put together their own newsletter for school distribution, presenting the results of their research work and opinion pieces on issues of special concern to them. Again, have them brainstorm possible articles, share ideas, and write first drafts, then follow up with writing conferences, revisions, and editing. The newsletter can be a onetime or multi-issue venture, and take any form students choose. It can include poetry and fiction, interviews and opinion surveys, photographic essays and artwork—whatever channels best express the students' interests and feelings.

3. Famous Refugees

Ask students to identify notable refugees who have made outstanding contributions in the fields of science, sports, music, dance, art, literature, medicine, law, politics, or the military. They will be quite surprised at the sheer number of high-achievers, including several Nobel Prize winners, who began their careers as refugees. (Some examples: Madeleine Albright, Albert Einstein, Golda Meir, the Dalai Lama, Rigoberta Menchú, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Isabel Allende, Haing Ngor, Benazir Bhutto, Frédéric Chopin, Corazon Aquino, Eli Weisel, Marlene Dietrich, and Bertolt Brecht.) Be sure to have students bear in mind the distinction between *refugees* and *economic migrants* as they compile their list. Ask each student to write an essay about the life and achievements of a refugee man or woman they particularly admire.

4. An Imaginative Journey

Ask students to review the various first-person refugee accounts they have read in the selections and, based on them, write an imaginative essay or short story about a particular individual or family. To help them fill in the parts of the refugee experience left unrecounted in specific readings, encourage them use the Personal Refugee Journey chart which you will find on page 22.

5. Hands Across the Sea

Encourage students who are developing a lively interest in the global community to begin a correspondence with someone their age in another part of the world through World Pen Pals, 1694 Como Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota, 55108; telephone (612) 647-0191.

Using the Video

1. Before Showing the Video

Give students a shortlist of questions to bear in mind as they watch the video. You may wish to create your own list, based on your own viewing of the video or on issues you have already discussed with the class as you worked through some of the readings together. If not, here are two suggestions: What changes might be made to ensure that refugee women and children receive adequate protection, nutrition, health care, and skills training? What information about refugee conditions as discussed in the video seemed most important and valuable, and why?

UNHCR/A Holman

2. Writing and Talking About the Video
Ask students to talk and/or write about the impact of the video. What surprised them most? Did they feel prepared by what they had already read for what they saw? How did the video sharpen or deepen their response? Would they like to share the video with other people? Why or why not?

Community Learning Activities

1. Guest Speakers
Invite a successful professional—or an outstanding young person of high school or college age—who originally came to this country as a refugee to speak to the students and tell them his or her story. Or contact Judy Mark, Schools Project Coordinator, c/o Women's Commission, 122 East 42nd Street, New York, New York 10017, telephone (212) 551-3000, to arrange for a representative from the Women's Commission to come and talk with the students about refugee issues.

2. Getting Organized
Encourage interested students to form a Refugee Club within the school to follow up on their concerns. They could put out a newsletter on the subject, initiate a letter-writing campaign to elected local or national officials, and/or meet with students from other schools who are also interested in refugee and human rights issues. Students who are already taking part in their school's United Nations club may be especially interested in pursuing this possibility.

3. Thinking Globally, Acting Locally
Students may want to "think globally and act locally" by serving as tutors or mentors to young refugees who need help with language skills—vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar—or with other subjects, like math or science. Just how two-way this learning experience can be is illustrated by the following letter by an eleventh-grader:

In the Schools Project I'm involved in, we have weekly trips to Dorchester, where there is a Saturday school for Vietnamese children. We work with these children hoping to improve their English and grammar skills, as well as giving them an opportunity to exercise their creative and expressive abilities through art. . . . There is a young boy at the school. His name is Kim. Each time I have been his tutor in pronunciation and sentence structure. What he has taught me, however, are invaluable life lessons. I teach him the alphabet—he teaches me perseverance. I teach him vocabulary—he teaches me patience. We teach each other and each week we come away with more.

There are several channels through which you can find out about refugee needs and services in your area. You can contact your state or city department of social services and ask to be connected to the department that handles refugee matters. There is also a refugee resettlement agency in most major cities. The one in your area may also be able to provide leads. Or you can contact the Immigration and Refugee Services of America (IRSA) for information about member agencies in your area. IRSA's address is 1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, D.C., 20036; telephone (202) 797-2105.

5. Raising Money to Help Refugees
Another way for students to "get involved" and make a difference, large or small, is to raise money for a particular refugee group or service. They might, for example, hold a fund-raiser or observe a day of fast and give the money they would have spent on lunch and snacks to a refugee relief or humanitarian organization of their choice.

Students may want to pick a particular refugee program now underway as the focus of their fund-raising efforts. (It helps to know that you are supporting a specific project and that all the funds you raise will be earmarked for it.)

To find out about specific projects, students can contact any of the humanitarian organizations listed on pages 25-26. All of them work on behalf of refugees and have public information or public education officers happy to provide interesting materials on such programs. The International Rescue Committee (IRC), for example, has offices throughout the country that can provide such materials. There are regional IRC offices in Fresno, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Ana, San Jose, and Sacramento, California; Washington, D.C., Miami, Florida; Decatur, Georgia; Boston, Massachusetts; West New York, New Jersey; Dallas, Texas; and Seattle, Washington.

In this connection, students might be interested in the following information about the costs of certain kinds of assistance. It shows just how far even a little help can go:

$750 will buy supplies to build a school or construct a well for clean water

$200 will buy basic equipment needed for a trained community health worker to start a village clinic (oral rehydration treatment containers, scales, stethoscope, scissors, medicine box, record-keeping materials, etc.)

$58 will buy 100 measles vaccines

$10 will buy school supplies for one student for one year, including paper, pencils, pens, and textbooks

$7 will buy 50 packets of oral rehydration solution which, when one packet is mixed with one liter of water, will keep one dehydrated child alive for one day

UNHCR/T. Brevik

Charting the Refugee Journey

A Personal Story

It begins with life experience before becoming a refugee

PRE-ESCAPE

Characterized by
FEAR, ANXIETY and possibility of HOPE

- anxiety about conditions in homeland
- experience or fear of persecution
- pressures of making escape decision
- anticipated sadness over losses
- pressures of making escape plans

Fear of detection
Fear of being turned in
Fear of bad luck

ESCAPE

Characterized by TERROR

- panic, shock, extreme fear
- trauma of having to make snap decisions that could mean the difference between life and death
- danger
- hunger
- fatigue

Fear of being victimized
Fear of being caught in crossfire
Fear of detection

REFUGEE CAMP EXPERIENCE

Characterized by HOPE
mingled with DISAPPOINTMENT

- adjustment to new (temporary) living conditions
- struggle to satisfy survival needs
- confusion
- boredom, shock, depression
- physical exhaustion from escape
- fear about unknown, uncertain future
- culture shock in new country
- overwhelming grief
- guilt over having survived when so many others perished
- self-doubt
- anger at situation
- helplessness/hopelessness
- lack of competence in solving problems in new environment
- fear of losing identity in refugee camp
- adjustment to lack of self-determination in refugee camp

VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

Characterized by FEAR of REPRISALS

- anticipation of reunion with surviving family, friends
- fear of confirmation of death of family
- anxiety over state of family, land, possessions (refugees often return to find strangers on their lands)
- concern over re-integration
- fear about government's real intentions

LOCAL INTEGRATION or THIRD-COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT

- facing fact of never going home
- loss of family and friends
- loss of familiar culture
- anxiety over discrimination or possible discrimination in host country
- concern over cultural adaptation
- concern for economic survival, daily survival issues
- language barriers

Chart by Suzy Commerford from *Flight to Hope: A Catholic Refugee Awareness Education!* Project prepared by The Catholic Consortium on Refugee Awareness Education, 1990

Glossary of Refugee Terms

Advocacy Pleading the cause of others; the act of upholding or defending as valid or right.

Aliens The legal term for people who are not citizens of the country in which they live.

Asylum A place of refuge, shelter, and protection. *Political asylum* is the official sanctuary a government is willing to grant to people fleeing personal danger in their home countries if they meet the definition of a refugee. (See *refugee*.). Unlike refugees admitted to a third country from overseas camps, people seeking political asylum have already entered a country to seek safety before asking the government to recognize them as refugees.

Boat people Refugees so desperate to escape their countries that they take to the sea in boats that are usually small, flimsy, poorly supplied, and overcrowded.

Country of asylum A country that grants refugees asylum.

Country of origin The country of birth or citizenship.

Detention The internment or holding in custody of a person whose application for asylum is under consideration by government authorities (when that person has already entered the country).

Development The process by which a nation or region achieves a more efficient and successful use of its resources for the greater good of all its people.

"Disappeared" The term used to describe the arbitrary and unlawful abduction of individuals or groups without cause or explanation.

Durable solutions Positive, lasting alternatives to the condition of being a refugee. The three durable solutions recognized by UNHCR all entail the goal of full social integration and self-support. They are: voluntary repatriation, local integration, and permanent resettlement.

Economic migrants People who, unlike refugees, make a free choice to seek a better way of life or improved standard of living by moving to another country.

Ethnic cleansing The use of a systematic campaign of terror and brutality to drive members of a particular ethnic minority out of a region.

Ethnic conflict Civil strife waged between different ethnic groups within a single country.

Forced repatriation A government's return of asylum seekers to their country of origin against their wishes.

Genocide The deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political, or cultural group.

Governmental Organization An organization created by a government and subject to the direction and control of that government.

Host country The neighboring or nearby country where refugees are able to find safe haven.

Humanitarian organizations Groups working to further human welfare and social reform.

Human rights Fundamental rights regarded as belonging to all people. Codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.

Immigrants People other than refugees who are legally admitted to a country for permanent residence or citizenship.

Infrastructure The underlying or basic framework of a system or organization. Often refers to such national or community facilities as roads and bridges; sanitation, water, and electrical systems; schools, hospitals, and health clinics.

International protection The protection extended to refugees by UNHCR on behalf of the international community.

Internally displaced people People who have fled their homes to seek safety, but who remain within their own borders, and thus are technically under the jurisdiction of their own governments and beyond the assistance of the international community.

Land mine An explosive device planted just below the surface of the ground and designed to be exploded by the pressure of a foot or a wheel.

Local integration One of the three durable solutions. Involves refugees' permanent relocation in the country where they first sought refuge.

Natural rights The idea that every individual enters society with certain basic rights to freedom, justice, and security that no government should deny or take away.

Nongovernmental organization (NGO) A private organization working independently to promote a cause its members believe in. NGOs working on behalf of refugees are active as aid workers in the field, providing assistance and monitoring human rights, and as advocates back home, bringing refugee issues to the attention of the news media, the public, and policy makers.

Refugees People who leave their country of origin because of "a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion."

Relief Material aid or assistance provided on an emergency or maintenance basis.

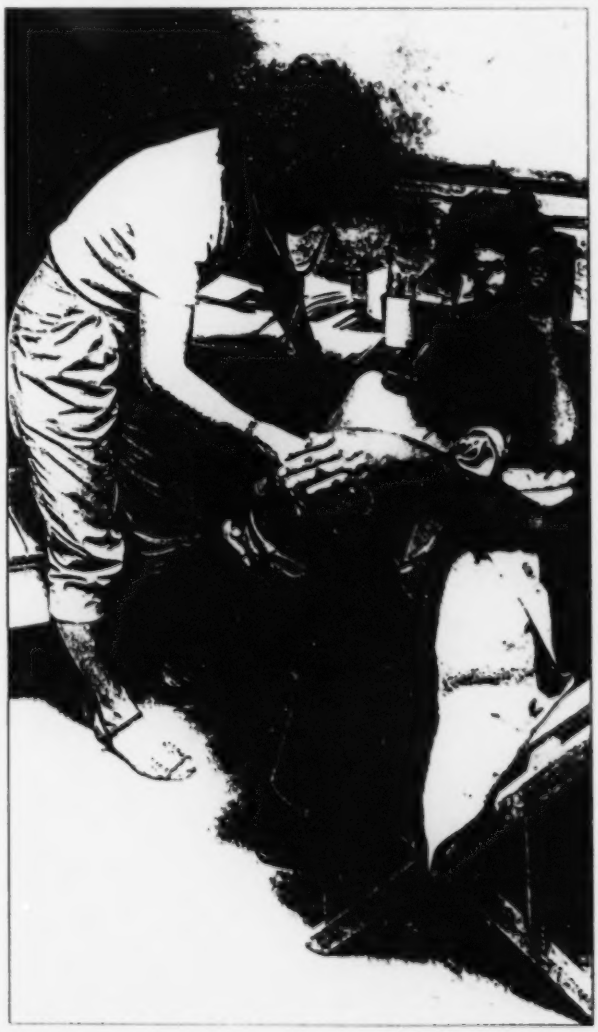
Resettlement One of the three durable solutions. Involves refugees' permanent relocation in a third country that is neither their homeland nor the host country that first offered them refuge.

Political dissident One who disagrees with and/or actively protests an established political system or government.

Sanctuary A place of refuge. Also, the name of an American ecumenical movement to provide haven to undocumented Central Americans in the United States.

Voluntary repatriation One of the three durable solutions. Involves refugees' own decision to return to their homeland.

Xenophobia Unwarranted fear of foreign ideas or people.



UNHCR/C. Fedele

Organizations Working on Behalf of Refugees

The following organizations are just some of the many private and governmental, national and international groups that work on behalf of refugees and can provide information and resources about refugee situations, issues, programs and policies.

International Organizations

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 780 Third Avenue, 28th Floor, New York, NY 10017. (212) 371-0770. Fax: (212) 838-5397.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017. (212) 326-7000. Fax: (212) 888-7465.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). High Commissioner: Sadako Ogata. UNHCR Liaison Office to the United Nations Headquarters, UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017. (212) 963-6200. UNHCR Branch Office for the United States, 1718 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20009. (202) 387-8546.

World Food Program (WFP). Liaison Office at UN Headquarters, NY: (212) 963-8364.

U.S. Government Offices

Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), Administration for Children and Families, 370 L'Enfant Promenade SW, 6th Floor, Washington, DC 20447. (202) 401-9246.

Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), 425 I Street NW, Washington, DC 20536. (202) 514-2000.

Department of State, Bureau for Refugee Programs (BRP), Room 5824, 2201 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20520. (202) 647-5822.

Private Voluntary Agencies and Human Rights Organizations

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), 1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102. (215) 241-7000. Fax: (215) 241-7026.

American Jewish Philanthropic Fund, 386 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. (212) 679-0010.

American Refugee Committee (ARC), Headquarters: 2344 Nicollet Avenue, Suite 350, Minneapolis, MN 55404. (612) 872-7060. Illinois office: 317 Howard Street, Evanston, IL 60202.

Amnesty International (AI). U.S. Section: 322 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10001. Address requests for assistance to: National Refugee Office, 500 Sansome Street, Suite 615, San Francisco, CA 94111. (415) 291-0601. Fax: (415) 291-8722.

Boat People S.O.S. Inc, P.O. Box 2652, Merrifield, VA 22116. Tel. and Fax: (703) 204-2662.

CARE, Inc. International Relief and Development Agency, 151 Ellis Street, Atlanta, GA 30303-2426. (404) 681-2552.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS)/U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC), 209 West Fayette Street, Baltimore, MD 21201-3443. (410) 625-2220. Fax: (410) 685-1635.

Center for Immigration Policy and Refugee Assistance (CIPRA), P.O. Box 2298, Georgetown University, Washington, DC 20057. (202) 298-0200.

Church World Service/Immigration and Refugee Program, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115. (212) 870-3153. Fax: (212) 870-2132.

Doctors without Borders USA, Inc., 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, New York 10112/ (212) 649 5962. Fax: 246-8577

Episcopal Migration Ministries (formerly The Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief/Refugee Migration Affairs),. 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017. (212) 687-9454.

Eritrean Relief Committee, Inc. 1325 15th Street NW, Suite 112, Washington, DC 20005. (202) 387-5001. Fax: (202) 387-5006.

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Inc. (HIAS), 333 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10001-5004.

Human Rights Internet, c/o Human Rights Centre, University of Ottawa, 57 Louis Pasteur, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5, Canada. (613) 564-3492. Fax: (613) 564-4054.

Human Rights Watch, 485 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017. (212) 972-8400. Fax: (212) 972-0905. Washington office: 1522 K Street NW, Washington, DC 20005. (202) 371-6592.

Immigration and Refugee Services of America (IRSA), 1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 797-2105. Fax: (202) 347-3418.

International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), In the U.S., 1319 F Street NW, Suite 820, Washington, DC 20004.

International Rescue Committee, Inc. (IRC), 122 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017. (212) 551-3000.

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), 1424 16th Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 462-5200.

Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (LCHR), 330 Seventh Avenue, 10th Floor North, New York, NY 10001. (212) 629-6170. Washington office: 100 Maryland Avenue NE, Room 502, Washington, DC 20002. (202) 547-5692.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), 390 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016-8803. (212) 532-6350.

Mennonite Central Committee, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, PA 17501. (717) 859-1151.

National Coalition for Haitian Refugees (NCHR), 16 East 42nd Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10017. (212) 867-0020. Fax: (212) 867-1668.

National Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Forum, 220 I Street NE, Suite 220, Washington, DC 20002. (202) 544-0004.

Operation California/USA, Inc., 7615 1/2 Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90046. (213) 658-8876. Fax: (213) 653-7846. Telex 295-252 OPCAUR.

Oxfam America, 26 West Street, Boston, MA 02111-1206. (617) 482-1211.

Refugee Voices Inc., 3041 4th Street NE, Washington, DC 20017-1102. (202) 832-0020. (800) 688-REFUGEE. Fax: (202) 832-5616.

Refugee Women in Development (RefWID), 810 1st Street NE, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20002. (202) 289-1104.

Refugees International, 21 Dupont Circle NW, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 828-0110.

The Salvation Army World Service Office (SAWSO), 615 Slaters Lane, Third Floor, Alexandria, VA 22313. (703) 684-5500.

Save the Children Federation, Inc., 54 Wilton Road, Westport, CT 06880. (203) 221-4000.

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), 1628 16th Street NW, 3rd Floor, Washington, DC 20009. (202) 667-4690. Fax: (202) 667-6449.

United States Association for UNHCR, Suite 500, 2012 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 296-1115. Fax: (202) 296-1081.

United States Catholic Conference/Migration and Refugee Services (USCC/MRS), 3211 4th Street NE, Washington, DC 20017-1194. (202) 541-3220. Fax: (202) 541-3399.

U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR), 1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 347-3507. Fax: (202) 347-3418.

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, c/o International Rescue Committee, Inc., 122 East 42nd Street, New York, New York 10017. (212) 551-3000.

World Learning, Inc., 1015 15th Street NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20005. (202) 408-5420.

World Vision Inc., 919 West Huntington Drive, Monrovia, CA 91016. (818) 305-7836.

28

A Refugee Bibliography

Magazines and Information Bulletins

Refugees magazine This illustrated magazine, published quarterly by UNHCR, features articles on refugee concerns around the world. An attractive format and clear prose make it easily accessible for high school students. For subscriptions, write to UNHCR, 1718 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20009.

Refugee Voices Published quarterly with the purpose of raising consciousness among U.S. citizens about the plight of recently arrived refugees and about refugees still in camps around the world. Supported entirely by contributions. Available from *Refugee Voices*, 713 Monroe Street NE, Washington, DC 20017.

Human Rights Education: The Fourth R A biannual newsletter available, along with many other educational materials, from Amnesty International's Educators' Network, 53 West Jackson, Chicago, IL 60601..

Regular news and information updates on specific refugee situations are available free of charge from UNHCR, 1718 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20009, and from the U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036.

Films and Videos

The following films and videos are all available on loan from UNHCR, 1718 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, D.C., 20009.

• *Ave Maria*. 1986. 24 min. Compiled from footage filmed in Africa, Asia, Central America, and Europe, this documentary shows the precarious existence of refugee women and children.

• *Beyond Emergency*. 1984. 30 min. Life in the refugee camps of Somalia after the initial emergency phase, and the assistance measures taken to promote durable solutions.

• *The Camp on Lantau Island*. 1984. 37 min. The situation of the increasingly forgotten boat people in Hong Kong, against a background of continuing arrivals, a slowdown in resettlement and the Hong Kong government's policy of placing the refugees in closed camps.

• *Casualties of Conflict*. 1985. 52 min. A two-part documentary about the major refugee situations in Central America. Part 1: Guatemalan refugees in Mexico. 24 min. Part 2. Salvadoran and Miskito Indian refugees in Hounduras, repatriation to Nicaragua. 28 min.

The Lost Tribes. 1984. 52 min. Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

• *Refugees: A Historical View*. 1981. 22 min. An overview of the refugee experience from the time of ancient civilization to 1951, when UNHCR began its work.

• *Refugee Children*. 1987. 22 min. Refugee children from Chad, Guatemala, and Vietnam are the focus of this film.

• *Sanctuary: An African Epic*. 1982. 26 min. Filmed in Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, this documentary focuses on efforts to find durable solutions for refugees in Africa.

• *Women Refugees*. 1980. 32 min. The special plight of refugee women and girls.

The following videos are available from the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 122 East 42nd Street, New York, New York 10017:

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(A teenage girl flees Cambodia, settles in Oregon, and experiences conflicts between her Cambodian values and her American life—especially where boys are concerned.)

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(A young Indian woman's journey through the world of refugees and immigrants to a life as an Iowa housewife in a household that also includes a Vietnamese refugee.)

Kiss the Dust. Elizabeth Laird. Dutton Children's Books: New York, 1992.

(The story of a young Kurdish girl and her well-to-do family who lose everything when they are forced to leave Iraq. A splendid introduction to each successive phase of the refugee experience from flight to resettlement.)

A Long Way from Home. Maureen Carne Wartski. Westminster Press: Louisville, Ky., 1982.

(The sequel to *A Boat to Nowhere*.)

The Magic Crossbow. Voices of Liberty Series. Zellerbach Family Fund: San Francisco, 1990.

(A multicultural unit that helps students understand Vietnam through its folktales.)

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The Middleman and Other Stories. Bharati Mukerjee. Fawcett Crest: New York, 1988.

(Stories about the transformations in the lives of new Americans from the Philippines, Iraq, India, and other lands.)

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(A multicultural unit that helps students to understand Cambodia through its folktales.)

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(The plight of three Vietnamese women.)

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(A collection of narratives by college students who were once refugees.)

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(Uprooted from their home in California, a young woman and her family spend the years of the Second World War living in an internment camp with 10,000 other Japanese-Americans.)

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(Oral histories of immigrant teens, some of them refugees.)

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(A collection of essays and stories written by young students from Southeast Asia.)

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(In 1915, in an early example of ethnic cleansing, the Turks attempted to exterminate the Armenians. Young Vernon is the only member of her family to survive a forced march into the Syrian desert, and ultimately comes to America.)

So Far from the Bamboo Grove. Yoko Kawashima Watkins. Puffin Books: New York, 1986.

(The story of a Japanese family's sojourn in North Korea during the Second World War.)

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(The story of a young man's risky escape from Vietnam to Thailand and then to the United States. A record of courage and salvation.)

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32

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34

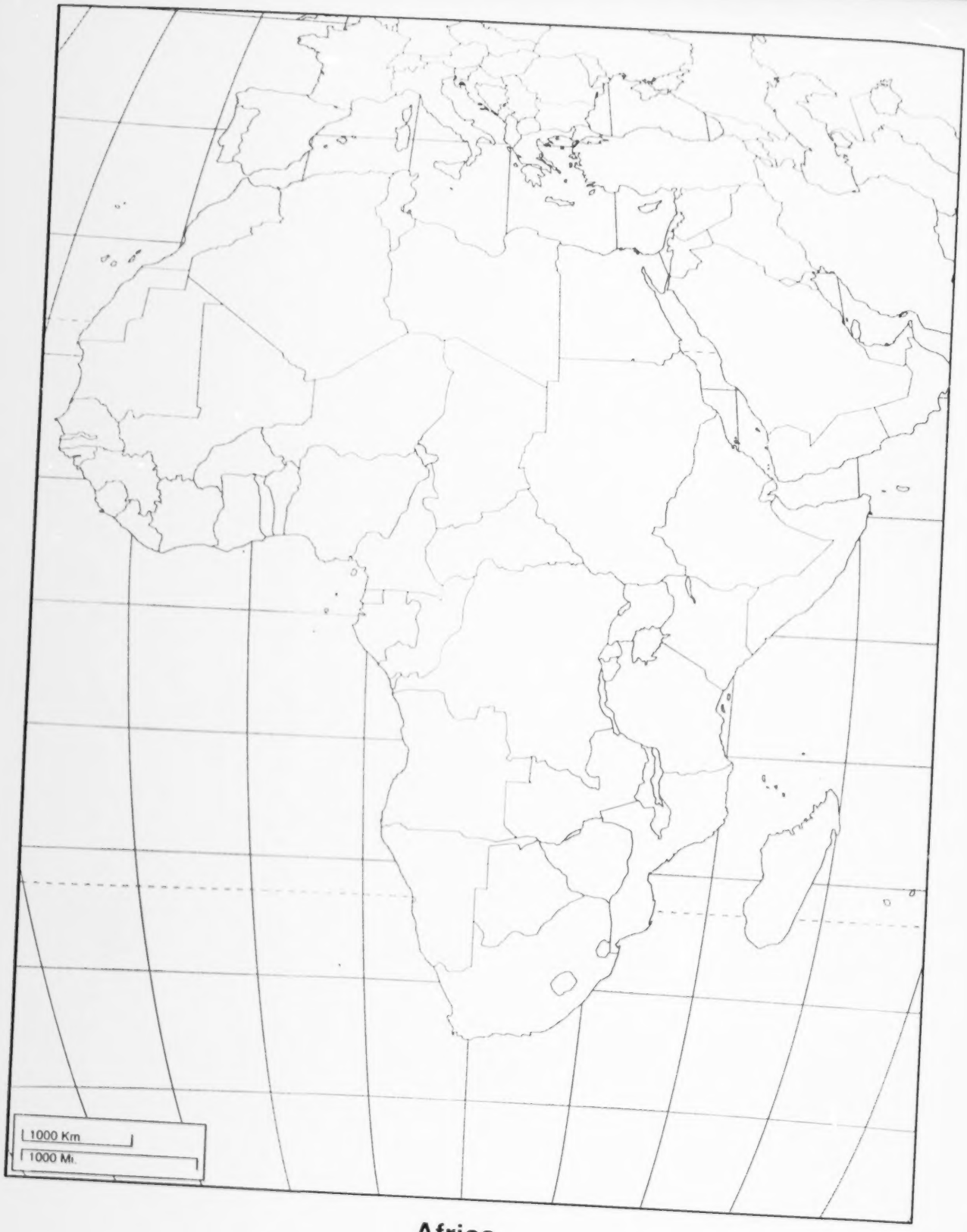
Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

122 East 42nd Street, New York, New York 10017 (212) 551-3000

Central America

The Refugee Experience

Study Maps



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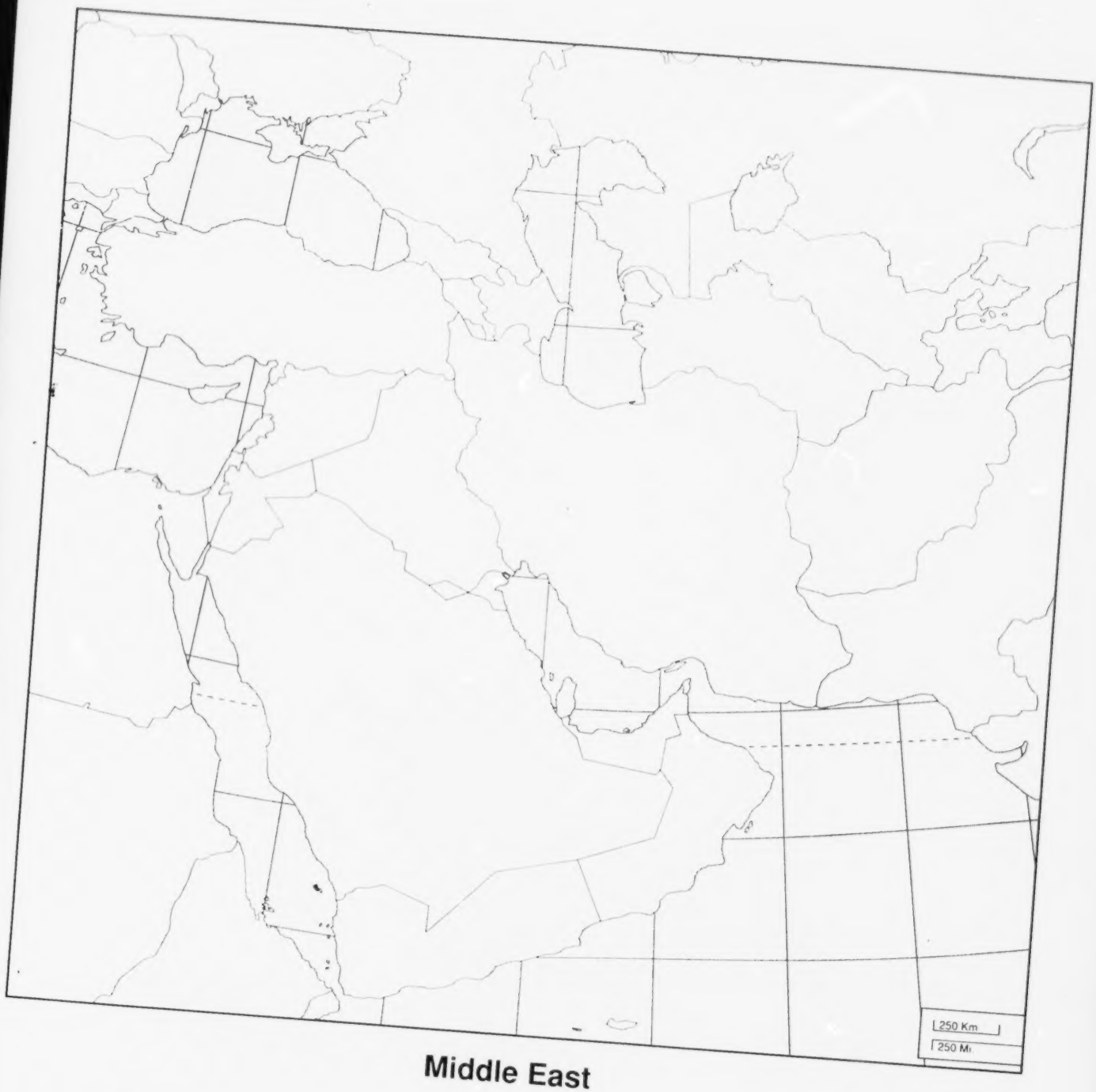

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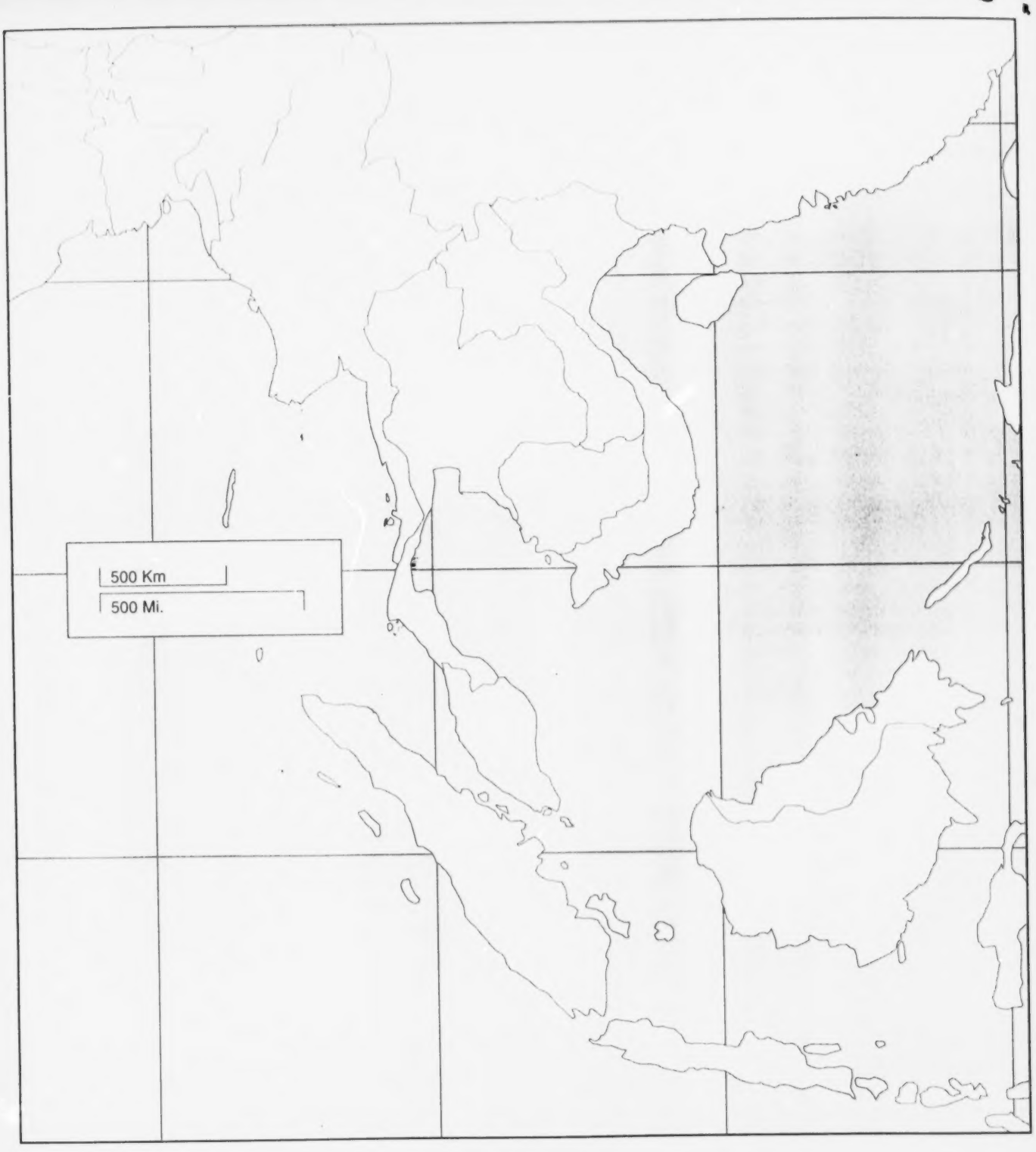
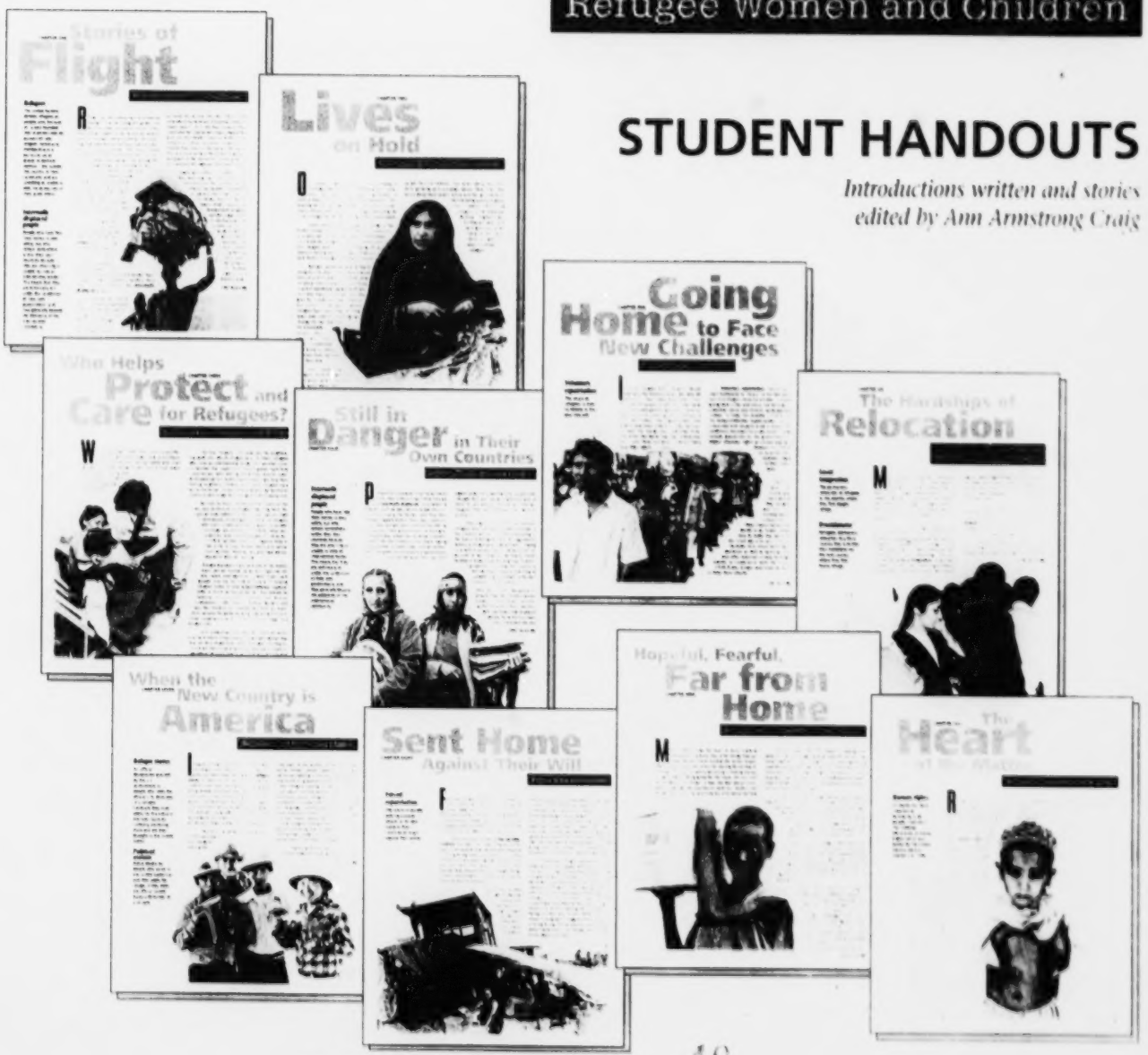


Southeast Asia

The Refugee Experience

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children


Stories of Flight
Lives on Hold
Going Home to Face New Challenges
Who Helps Protect and Care for Refugees?
Still in Danger in Their Own Countries
The Hardships of Relocation
When the New Country is America
Sent Home Against Their Will
Hopeful, Fearful, Far from Home
The Heart

STUDENT HANDOUTS

Introductions written and stories edited by Ann Armstrong Craig

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CHAPTER ONE

Stories of Flight

How People Become Refugees

Refugees

The United Nations defines refugees as people who, because of "a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion," are outside the country of their nationality and are unwilling or unable to seek the protection of their government.

Internally displaced people

People who have fled their homes to seek safety, but who remain somewhere within their own countries because they are unwilling or unable to cross an international border. This means that they are technically still under the jurisdiction of their own governments, and thus generally beyond the assistance of the international community.

Refugees are the human face of enormous changes now sweeping the globe. For the first time in history, most of the wars being fought in the world are within nations instead of between them. The resulting chaos and destruction have uprooted millions of ordinary people. They may or may not hold any political beliefs; their "crime" is often simply belonging to the wrong ethnic or religious group or living in disputed territory. Whatever the reason, they find themselves under attack—persecuted, brutalized, and living in terror. One day they realize they no longer have a choice: they must leave their homes and everything they own and flee for their lives.

In doing so, they join a host of others. Twenty million people have officially become ***refugees*** by crossing an international border to find safety in another land. Twenty-four million others, unable or reluctant to cross an international border, have sought refuge somewhere within their own countries and become ***internally-displaced*** people.

Ironically, the close of the Cold War has had much to do with the increase in refugees. On the one hand, it has brought an opportunity to end certain conflicts around the world. On the other, it has unleashed the demons of internal conflict in many places. As Cold War tensions have eased and the superpowers have relaxed their grip on the smaller nations within their influence, ethnic tensions, rivalries, and hatreds have risen to the surface. We can see this process at work in the former Yugoslavia and parts of the old Soviet Union, as well as in countries throughout Africa and Asia.

Fragile governments, unable to subdue warring factions (and often involved in the conflict themselves), are unable or unwilling to protect their own citizens. To make matters worse, many small countries are flooded with weapons, another legacy of the Cold War years. The combination of weak or abusive governments and an endless supply of arms has often led to the violation of human rights on a massive scale.

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How People Become Refugees

CONTINUED

Many refugees take flight at a moment's notice, just before their village is attacked and destroyed, and with nothing but the clothes on their backs. If they take anything at all, it is only what they can carry with them. Often, too, they have no idea where they are heading; they know only that they must find a place to be safe.

It is hardest for the women and children, who in many cases must make the journey without fathers, husbands, or brothers. Fully 80 percent of all refugees and displaced people are women and children, whose male relatives have been killed or who are missing, imprisoned, away fighting, or in hiding.

As the refugees make their way across rivers and mountains, through deserts or jungles, they often suffer greatly from hunger and thirst, and may even be attacked by armed bandits. They seldom find a place of safety right away and for weeks at a time may be constantly on the move.

As you read the following five selections—by and about refugees from Rwanda, Bosnia, Guatemala, Afghanistan, and Vietnam—try to imagine yourself in each person's shoes, and think about what they all have in common.

Saved by a Loyal Friend

A Rwandan man escapes with his life and nothing else

Before the war, Jean taught school in the Rwandan village of Muyaga. Among the 600 residents, 200 were Tutsis like him. After the Hutu President's assassination, Jean's world fell apart. He watched from a hill as homes were burned, cattle were stolen, and corpses floated in the river...

A Hutu neighbor who was Jean's friend—a man to whom Jean had once made a present of a cow—drew him aside and warned him that Jean was on a list of people to be killed. Jean ran. He hid in a hole for the next five days, with nothing to eat or drink except for small amounts his Hutu friend was able to bring him at night. The friend told Jean that the sounds he had been hearing all day were the noise of guns and the cries of the dying—the cacophony of a massacre. Jean learned that his wife and children were among those killed, and that groups of Hutus continued to scour the countryside, looking for additional Tutsi victims.

After five days, Jean left his hole at night, his clothes filthy and torn, his legs aching, and his head full of visions of hell. Terrified, he crept to the river to try to swim across to neighboring Burundi. Although several of the militia saw him take off his clothes to make his swim, he was able to escape. His friend also swam across, and gave Jean his yellow T-shirt and pants before crossing back to Rwanda—a parting gift in memory of a cow given in friendship long ago. It is all Jean was able to take with him.

From "Jean's Story"
by Ann Brown, a member of
Doctors Without Borders, 1994

FEAR AND GRIEF CONTORT THIS BOSNIAN WOMAN'S FACE AS A TRUCK CARRIES HER AND HER WOUNDED CHILD TO SAFETY. [ELIZABETH RAPPAPORT]

We Could Bring Only One Small Bag

A Vietnamese woman must destroy the cherished keepsakes of a lifetime

We could bring only what fit into one small bag. They warned us not to take too much. For days I burned documents on my terrace, papers from when I worked for my government, papers from when I worked for the Americans. I couldn't think, except to destroy whatever would bring trouble. I burned photographs of the whole family at Tet, year after year, all of us together—my father's nine birds. I stared at the black-and-white pictures: me—two, smiling, a pigtail on both sides, holding my eldest brother's hand. Me, the angel in the school play, a tiara on my head. Me in China at the bottom of Sea Mountain, my children standing beside me.

As the pile of ashes floated away, I felt I was burning my life.

Tran Thi Nga, Vietnamese refugee quoted in Shallow Graves: Two Women and Vietnam *by Wendy Larsen and Tran Thi Nga. Random House, 1986*

A REFUGEE FAMILY FROM AZERBAIJAN. EIGHTY PERCENT OF REFUGEES ARE WOMEN AND CHILDREN, AND MANY ARE SEPARATED FROM THEIR FATHERS, HUSBANDS, AND BROTHERS.

Her Cries Pierced My Soul

An Afghan woman describes her family's harrowing journey to safety in Pakistan

My father had been in hiding for a year and a half and had not been living with my family in Jalalabad. It was early evening the night of our flight when he came to join my mother, grandparents, four sisters, a brother, and myself. . . . We waited forty-five days in a village not far from Jalalabad until it was safe to move on. Nine of us shared one room. Frequently Soviet planes flew over. I know many people who went ahead of us came under enemy fire. Later we saw their graves as we crossed the mountains. When we finally moved on, my father remained behind in Jalalabad. In the event one of us was captured, he might be in a position to win our release.

It was night when we began our ascent of the mountains that divide Afghanistan and Pakistan. The mountain journey took six days and nights, with no food, no water, no camels to carry us. My mother's delirious cries for water pierced my soul. I will never forget her anguish. We could do nothing for her. Just before dawn on the fourth day we reached the top of the mountain and began our descent into Pakistan and our life here. My father followed when he knew we were safe.

Latifa, Afghan refugee quoted in Disposable People? The Plight of Refugees *by Judy Mayotte, Orbis Books, 1992*

We Were Terrified

A convoy of buses takes women and children out of Sarajevo under fire

We were in the sixth grade in Sarajevo when the war started in 1992. The city was under heavy fire from the Serbs in the hills around us, and we were in danger all the time. The Children's Embassy of Sarajevo [an organization of famous Bosnians] organized a convoy of buses to take mothers and children to safety in the Croatian town of Split, 200 miles away. The Embassy got the Serbs to promise that they wouldn't fire on the convoy.

There were eight buses. Each was meant for 50 passengers, but carried 150 people for our journey. We were in the first bus with our mother. She was crying as we said goodbye to my dad. We were all scared as the buses started rolling, and sure enough, the Serbs began firing at us. Our driver screamed for us to get down on the floor. There were lots of explosions, and our bus was riddled with bullets as we drove off.

When we stopped at the first checkpoint, a Chetnik [Serb soldier] got on and asked if there were any men on board. We were terrified, because we knew from the news on television that Chetniks were killing Muslim women and kids. But he let us go when he saw we had no men with us.

It took us two days to get to Split, traveling over mountain roads because the main highways were closed. We were so happy when we finally got to Croatia. We didn't know then that the war would last so long. We've been refugees for two years now. We still hope we can go back someday.

Ismar and Damir Ibrahimpasic, Fourteen-year-old Bosnian refugee twins now living in the United States, 1994

FLEEING REFUGEES, LIKE THESE GUATEMALANS, CAN USUALLY TAKE ONLY WHAT THEY CAN CARRY ON THEIR BACKS OR IN THEIR HANDS – SOMETIMES JUST ONE SUITCASE PER FAMILY.

Run, the Soldiers are Coming!

Villagers in Guatemala suffer hunger and thirst as they flee for their lives

I remember the dawn of July 17, when we heard the cry, "Run, the soldiers are coming!" The children began to cry, terrorized, but after we started walking they calmed down some. Each person carried his belongings, his poncho, some tortillas, cornmeal, or whatever he could find. Each child who could walk also carried something.

The people of three villages came together in one place. We were resting when we again heard shots nearby. Once again we fled. Finally we came to another place farther away, where we found more people from other villages. There we rested again and shared what we had. We ran out of water and ate dry cornmeal. We became nauseated from lack of water. There were too many of us, so we decided to divide up into smaller groups. But in all this activity, families got divided up....

On July 18 at 5 A.M., we were all up and ready to go. We washed with the dew from the plants. We found yucca and some other food, and we each ate a little. We were busy doing all this when we heard shots. We had to run again. Minutes later we saw the soldiers come running down a road. What hurt me most was seeing the old people with their canes, but thank God we managed to get away. From a distance, we saw the village burn.

Regina Hernandez, Guatemalan refugee quoted in Guatemala: Tyranny on Trial, *edited and translated by Susanne Jonas, Ed McCaughan, and Elizabeth Sutherland Martinez, Synthesis, 1984*

DESPERATE TO ESCAPE, THESE BOSNIANS CROWD ONTO A TRUCK THAT WILL TAKE THEM AWAY FROM THE FIGHTING AND KILLING. [ELIZABETH RAPPAPORT]

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Using the accompanying maps, locate and fill in the names of the following countries: Rwanda, Burundi; Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia (parts of the former Yugoslavia); Guatemala; Afghanistan, Pakistan; Vietnam.

2. Choose at least two of the readings for comparison and contrast. What feelings and experiences do these stories of escape have in common? How do they differ?

3. Imagine that, because your lives are in danger, you and your family have to leave your home and community—perhaps even your country. Which members of the family would take the lead in planning your escape? If it were up to you, where would you take them for safety? What would you do about family members who were too old or sick to make the journey? To which friends would you have time to say goodbye?

4. If you had time to plan for your escape, you and your family would probably pack differently than if you had to leave at a moment's notice. Suppose each of you could only take a small bag or suitcase that you had to carry. What would you choose to take if you were leaving tomorrow? What would you probably grab if you had to leave immediately? What would each of you *want* to take, and what, for health or safety reasons, should you probably take instead?

This publication of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children's Schools Project is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.
Introductions written and stories edited by Ann Armstrong Craig. All photos supplied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER TWO

Lives on Hold

Everyday Life in Refugee Camps

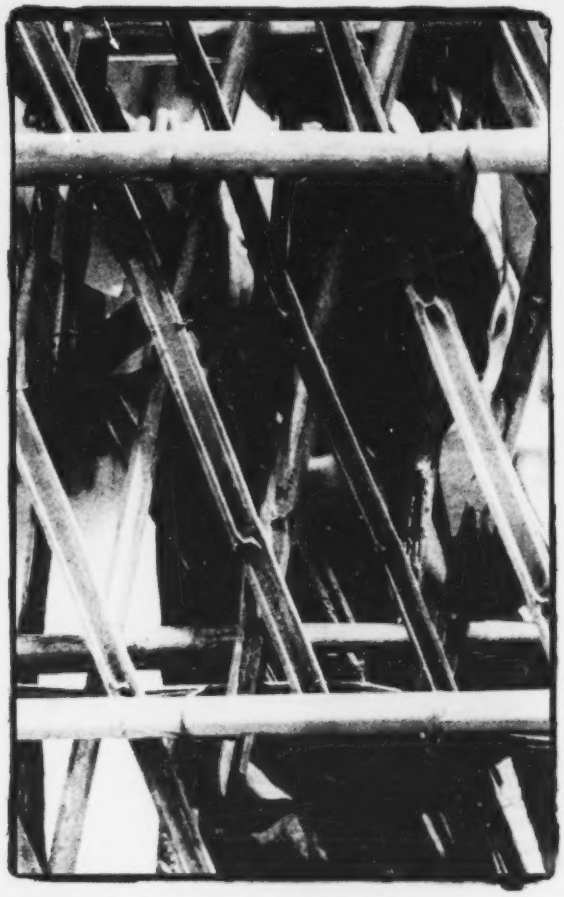
Once a place of safety has been found, a displaced or refugee family enters a new phase of its experience: waiting—until it's safe to go home, or until a place is found to resettle permanently. This waiting period can take weeks or months or years. Many children who are born to refugee families grow to be teenagers knowing nothing of their native lands.

Sometimes a family's place of refuge is the home of relatives or friends in another country or in a safer part of their own country. Sometimes, too, desperate refugees cross into other countries illegally and live there in hiding. Most families fleeing war and chaos, however, seek shelter in refugee camps and centers.

Refugee camps can be grim places. Imagine row after row of windowless huts on a dusty plain, or endless ranks of canvas tents in a sea of frozen mud, or airless warehouses packed with families who have no privacy. As time goes by, conditions may improve, but never to the point where refugees have more than minimal space and comfort. Nothing can change the fact that, for the foreseeable future, their lives are "on hold," suspended in a kind of limbo between their old lives and their new.

Not surprisingly, refugees often feel anxious, frustrated, and hopeless. They worry about their homes and the people they left behind. They worry about their children, growing up in a strange culture. Most of all, they worry about their futures: where will they go from here?

The following selections about five camps sheltering refugees from Rwanda, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and Laos will give you some idea of the hardships of camp life and its impact on refugees.



A CAMBODIAN CHILD GAZES THROUGH THE GATES OF A REFUGEE CAMP IN THAILAND. SHE HAS KNOWN NO OTHER HOME. [INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE]

I Realized How Much We Had Lost

Afghan women find their lives painfully different in a refugee camp in Pakistan

In the two and a half years I spent confined in our tiny compound, I realized how much the women of our country had lost. We were used to space, great openness. Beyond the spacious courtyard—where through much of the year we performed our household tasks and where the children played and chickens and goats roamed—lay the orchards. There were rows of a variety of trees—apple, peach, almond, mulberry. There were grapevines and a flower and a vegetable garden. We had our own well, a close source of water. We enjoyed the companionship of other women; we never wanted for something to do. Most important, we felt secure in ourselves as we shared responsibility for the household and the labor with the men.

During my first days in a refugee camp with my family on the outskirts of Peshawar, I felt my eyes were opened. The compounds were so close together and the interiors were so small. Women who had never been beyond their villages before were frightened and despondent. Many of the women and children were dirty. Some neglected their children. . . .

These were not the village women I knew in Afghanistan. War, flight, and the congested living on barren, treeless land had transformed them. Living with a constant sense of transience, many did not try to make a home within their compounds. They simply existed.

Sohaila, Afghan refugee quoted in Disposable People? The Plight of Refugees *by Judy Mayotte, Orbis Books, 1992*

We Were the Lucky Ones

Frustration follows flight for this young man in a camp for the internally displaced in Azerbaijan

I am tired of standing in line. And I am getting tired of talking to journalists. I know they mean well, but sometimes I feel as though I am in a cage at the zoo. All I really want is to go home. The international organizations which have been helping me and my family and the several thousand others here in this tent camp give us food and clothing. But I need to get back to work. I used to work in the vineyards. Of course, now I can't . . . In fact, on a good day, you can see the vineyard from here. I had to flee my village when the enemy advanced into our region. We had to cross the Arax River that runs along the Azeri-Iranian border, cross over into Iran, search for our other family from whom we were separated, and recross the river back into Azerbaijan. Eventually we made it to this camp. We were the lucky ones. Hundreds drowned.

BOSNIAN REFUGEES MAKE A HOME FOR THEMSELVES IN A GYMNASIUM THAT SERVES AS THEIR TEMPORARY SHELTER.

Chingiz, Azeri father of four, in testimony given to volunteers of the International Azerbaijan Research and Development Institute, 1993

They Say, "Be Strong"

At the height of the Rwandan refugee crisis, the dusty air smells of death at a camp in Zaire

THE CROWDING AND LACK OF PRIVACY THESE CAMBODIANS LIVE WITH ARE TYPICAL OF THE CONDITIONS THAT PREVAIL IN MOST REFUGEE CAMPS. [WOMEN'S COMMISSION]

Kibumba is a camp 28 kilometers north of the town of Goma, Zaire. It is the most populous of all the Rwandan refugee camps in the area, and it is the farthest from a clean water source. . . . In most such refugee emergencies in Africa, the death rates are highest among children under five. In this situation, the death rate is high among this group, but due to the physical endurance and strength required by adults to survive this situation, the death rate among adults is equally high. This has caused a serious problem: orphans. Mothers literally work themselves to death trying to care for their families. They lie down and die, leaving their children sitting next to their dead bodies. Usually the children are so confused they do not understand for many hours that their mothers are dead nor what to do about the situation when they realize they are alone. Often the children sit next to their mothers' bodies for days before they either wander off or lie down and die next to them.

The camp is so densely populated that from a few meters away one cannot see the ground between the people at all, only the mass of people. The air smells of dead bodies. It is dusty from all the people walking and is smoky and sticky from all the wood fires. There is a low rumble of people talking sharply to one another. Almost never does anyone laugh or cry. When the refugees do greet each other, they say, "Be strong."

From a report by Barbara Smith, Health Coordinator for the International Rescue Committee and a board member of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 1994

It's Better to Kill Time Than to Be Killed

A Laotian speaks sadly of the idleness and dependency that mark his life at a camp in Thailand

The years go by, and one day is just like another, and I have nearly stopped wondering what is going to happen with us. At one time we hoped to be able to return to our country, but it won't happen as long as there are foreign troops there. It's better to try to kill time than to be killed.

We have our daily life, and we live reasonably well. But it's crowded. There are many, many, many of us. The worst of it is not having anything to do. We're used to working the soil, and we've never been afraid of work. There are some good things in being here, of course. The women sew the way they always have, and the children go to school. We never did that. I have my . . . knives to make, and with a little luck I can sell one now and then.

Nobody here goes hungry, and we know that many people are helping us from outside, and we are very grateful. Still, it's strange being dependent on others when you want to be managing for yourself and supporting your family.

Saincny, Laotian refugee quoted in Shallow Graves: Two Women and Vietnam *by Wendy Larsen and Tran Thi Nga, Random House, 1986*

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Living in Tents Ankle-Deep in Mud

Conditions are grim at a camp for Bosnian refugees in Croatia

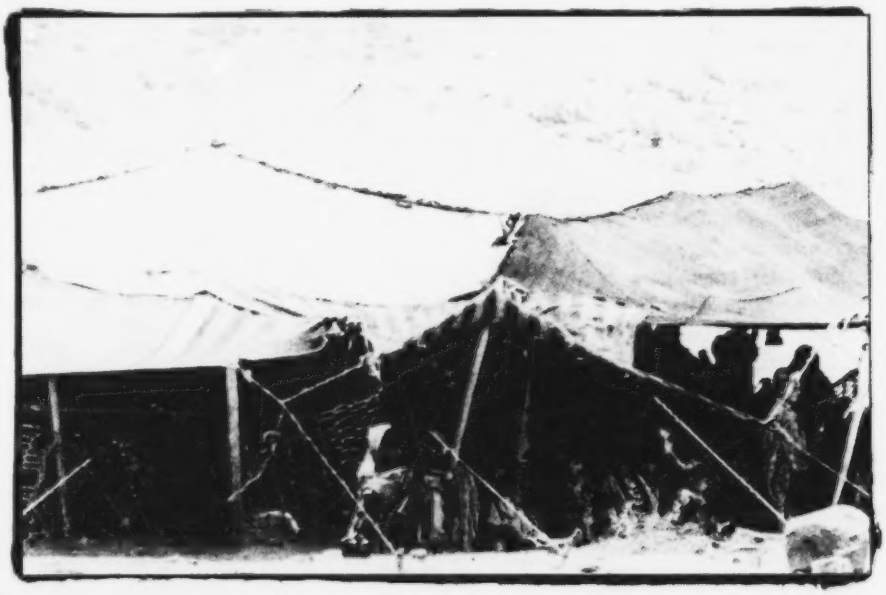
The 4,000 people at Gasinchi Camp are living in cramped conditions with insufficient sanitation and only two hours of hot water a day. The camp kitchens can serve 800 people at a time, which they must do in four to five shifts for each meal. . . .

We visited the barracks and prefab housing first and were invited by several families—mostly women and children—to share in a scarce and highly prized cup of coffee.

...One woman, a grandmother, spoke of their daily hardships and of her two-year-old granddaughter who, on their first day at the camp, screamed when she saw the camera being used to photograph new arrivals for identification cards. The child thought it was a gun and that she was about to be shot. . . .

The crowded living conditions and pervasive cold, fog, and dampness at Gasinchi mean that colds and bronchitis are widespread. But the worst conditions are suffered by the large group of Bosnians evacuated from Karlovac transit center, who now live in tents in the middle of a marshy forest, ankle-deep in mud and facing the distinct possibility of a bitterly cold and snowy winter without any shelter more substantial than this.

From a report on Bosnian refugee conditions by Mary Anne Schwalbe and Pippa Scott, members of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 1993



AN AFGHAN REFUGEE CAMP IN PAKISTAN. MANY OF THE AFGHANS WHO FLED TO NEIGHBORING PAKISTAN OR IRAN WERE UNABLE TO RETURN HOME FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS.

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Using the accompanying maps, locate and fill in the names of the following countries: Rwanda, Zaire; Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia (parts of the former Yugoslavia); Afghanistan, Pakistan; Azerbaijan (a breakaway republic of the former Soviet Union); Iran; Laos, Thailand.

2. Describe the range of feelings and attitudes expressed in these selections. What do they tell you about life in each of the different camps? What do they tell you about each of the different speakers?

3. Suppose you had been living in a refugee camp for over a year, and had left your community with only your immediate family. Which other family and friends would you miss most, and why? Which familiar places, possessions, and activities would you miss most, and why?

4. Suppose you had been living in a refugee camp for over ten years. What would you want most for yourself? For your family? What hopes would you keep alive?

5. Refugees, like all of us, have many needs besides those for basic food and shelter. Choose two selections and describe how one or more of the following would improve life in that particular camp: (a) more protection against the elements; (b) more personal protection against attack; (c) improved nutrition; (d) more adequate health care; (e) schools for children; (f) literacy and skills training for adults, especially women; (g) opportunities to earn money by practicing traditional skills and crafts.

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Introduction, section and photo edited by Ann Armstrong Grant. All photos supplied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER THREE

Who Helps Protect and Care for Refugees?

Refugee Relief Agencies at Work

Who helps refugees when they arrive in another country, frightened, hungry, sick, and exhausted? Who helps them set up camps and create sanitation systems, brings in the tons of food, water, tents, and clothing they need to survive, and provides lifesaving medical care?

The first "helpers," of course, are the neighboring lands into which refugees pour. In effect, refugees who cross an international border into another country become that country's uninvited guests. Such host countries are often among the world's poorest, least-developed nations. Some countries willingly help their fleeing neighbors. Others try to force refugees back across the border, or put them in prison-like detention centers to discourage more refugees from crossing over.

Beyond the shelter offered by host countries, the care and protection of refugees has long been the special responsibility of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). All refugees who have crossed a border in search of *asylum*, or refuge, are entitled to UNHCR's help, provided the host country requests it. (Most do.) UNHCR can then step in to organize help in the form of food, shelter, wells and sanitation facilities, medical care and legal advice, education and job training.

Refugee assistance is also provided by the world's many private humanitarian aid organizations (also called relief agencies). Indeed, many such groups exist for the express purpose of helping refugees. Some of these *nongovernmental organizations*, or NGOs, as they are known, may already be familiar to you—the International Rescue Committee, CARE, Doctors Without Borders, and Save the Children, for example. But there are many more around the globe working independently or in close cooperation with UNHCR at every stage of a refugee crisis.

NGO workers are often the first to alert the world to a rise in ethnic tensions and human rights abuses that may set off a refugee flow. When a refugee crisis begins, NGOs are there to provide tents, food, water supplies, sanitation facilities, health care, and later, schools and skills-training programs.

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Refugee Relief Agencies at Work

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NGOs work very closely with UNHCR to arrange solutions to the refugees' need for a permanent home. They also play a critical role during voluntary repatriation, accompanying refugees back home and providing hands-on assistance as the refugees rebuild.

Many nongovernmental organizations do a different kind of work, called advocacy—keeping the world informed of refugees' changing needs and arguing their case before government policy makers. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children is one such organization. Their representatives make regular investigative visits to refugee camps and centers and return to report their findings in the news media and at government hearings.

In the next selections, you will read about the impact of refugees on one host country, and get an inside look at the dedicated and often dangerous work done by the men and women of UNHCR and the NGO refugee relief agencies.

I Smiled, Inside and Out

In letters sent home, a young American doctor describes the challenges and satisfactions of working with Burmese refugees in Bangladesh

September 9, 1992: This is a difficult transition for me from my training (do everything you can for the individual patient) because in a refugee camp of over 40,000, you can do more total harm if you spend lots of time and resources on an individual. Not a difficult concept perhaps, but hard to watch children with treatable conditions die....

October 16, 1992: Confusion is never glamorous, and chaos, of course, is much worse. The scene in Gundum was somewhere between the two. I set about to evaluate and treat the patients. Dalia, a 24-year-old French nurse, worked on organization of the patients and staff to reestablish some degree of sanitary conditions. Aingion, the logistician from Madagascar, filled up the water tanks, got more cholera beds, and began the process of setting up the cholera camp. The first patient died about five minutes before we arrived and the young local doctor wept from exhaustion.

December 1, 1992: Cholera is finished in Gundum for now. We closed the cholera camp three days after my last letter. I almost went back to Ukhia the night before closing the camp. Things were quiet and I wanted to sleep in a bed. But something kept me there.... I was outside the camp talking with some refugee leaders after their morning prayers at about 5 a.m. I'd told them that cholera was finished, and we all thanked Allah together.

As I walked back to the camp, sure enough a father came in with his four-year-old son in his arms. The child was not just dehydrated from cholera but shriveled. I thought of my fingertips when in a bath too long, because his entire hands and feet looked that way.... It is not often in this job that you really feel like you saved a life, but when he walked out of the hospital three days later I smiled, inside and out.

From letters home by Michael Curtis, an American doctor working with Burmese refugees in Bangladesh for Doctors Without Borders, 1992

AT A WAREHOUSE IN BOTSWANA, REFUGEES FROM ZIMBABWE CHOOSE CLOTHES PROVIDED BY UNICEF.

MANY THOUSANDS OF VIETNAMESE FLED THEIR COUNTRY BY BOAT, RISKING EVERYTHING IN THE SEARCH FOR SAFETY. RESCUED IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA, A FAMILY IS WELCOMED BY A REFUGEE RELIEF WORKER.

The Pros & Cons of Being a Host Country

For Bangladesh, there are both advantages and disadvantages to sheltering refugees, as this doctor points out

It is an interesting question to me whether or not the refugee population is a net economic hardship or benefit to the local population. A hardship yes, because limited land is being used for the camps, firewood is being cut, prices of basic foodstuffs are rising, etc. On the other hand, the relief groups have hired literally hundreds of the local staff, at good salaries by Bangladesh standards, thus infusing cash into the local economy. I honestly don't know which way it would come out. What is a constant issue for us is concern about providing services inside the camp that are not available outside the camp. Is it right for refugees to have better health care than the local population?

From a letter home by Michael Curtis, an American doctor working with Burmese refugees in Bangladesh for Doctors Without Borders, 1992

ALL OVER THE WORLD, UNHCR AND OTHER RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS HELP PROVIDE REFUGEES LIKE THESE ETHIOPIANS WITH THE FOOD SUPPLIES THEY NEED.

Not Enough Resources to Go Around

The presence of refugees can be a heavy burden on a host country like Malawi

Malawi is a small, densely populated country in southern Africa... ... A massive influx of refugees from the devastating war in neighboring Mozambique began in 1986. By 1993, Malawi was host to a million Mozambican refugees—equivalent to 10 percent of its own total population.... They live either in so-called open settlements alongside Malawian villages, or else in large, organized camps. As the shortage of arable land prevents their involvement in agriculture, they are almost entirely dependent on outside relief for food, water, and essential services.

Their presence has been a tremendous burden on local economies.... Even more devastating has been the impact of the refugee presence on Malawi's forests. Refugees have felled large numbers of trees in order to acquire wood for fuel and building materials....Malawi is currently losing about 3.5 percent of its forest cover each year.

In addition to these problems, the steadily increasing demand for already scarce goods and services has led to tension. Refugees are in direct competition with Malawians for access to severely stretched government services, including health facilities, schools, water supplies, informal employment opportunities, and welfare programs. Despite the provision of large-scale foreign aid to support the refugees, the Malawi government has had to divert a significant proportion of its own revenues to the refugee program.

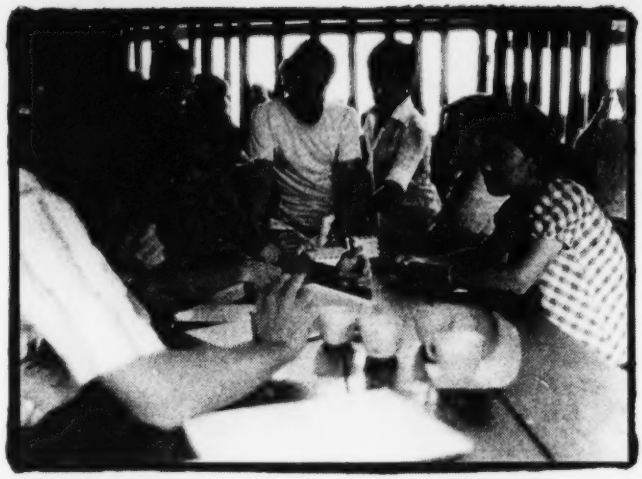
From "Shouldering the Burden: The Case of Malawi," in The State of the World's Refugees 1993, *by UNHCR, Penguin Books, 1993*

Alex Led Them In

The work of UNHCR and relief agencies is exemplified by this dedicated worker at a camp for Bosnian refugees in Croatia

At Gasinchi camp we met a UNHCR field officer named Alexandra who had accompanied the 1,100 refugees from Karlovac to Gasinchi. When they saw how dreadful their living conditions there would be, they had refused to enter. So Alex had led them in. She stayed with them in their tents for six days until some of their needs had been met—and promised not to leave them without presenting their case to UNHCR authorities. When we got to the center, she was in the midst of reassuring a weeping, traumatized Bosnian refugee and her young daughter that they would indeed be resettled.... The little girl put her arms around her mother's knees in an effort to comfort her. Alex told us later that this distraught woman needed to be reassured every day, so great was her continuing terror.

From a report on Bosnian refugee conditions by Mary Anne Schwalbe and Pippa Scott, members of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 1993



HELP IN PLANNING THE NEXT STAGE OF THEIR LIVES IS ONE OF THE SERVICES REFUGEES NEED MOST. HERE CAMBODIAN REFUGEES CONSULT WITH RELIEF WORKERS TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO GO HOME.

The Stress and Dangers of Relief Work

Aid workers need emotional resilience as well as professional skill

Faced with an unprecedented psychological load on their staff, relief officials say crises like Bosnia, Somalia, and now Rwanda have changed the way they do business. Increasingly, they are sending workers on short-term contracts, and hiring them as much for their emotional resilience as professional skill....

Like other organizations, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has begun offering psychotherapy for its staff much like that given soldiers returning from battle zones. The committee requires its staff to take a break every six weeks, and sends workers on short-term stints....

But more than ever, relief workers are seeking such help themselves, officials say. Not only are nerves jangled by ever-greater calamities; workers have also been shot at, hijacked, and attacked.

After an IRC worker in Somalia drove over a land mine last December and lost his leg, the organization started a counseling service in Nairobi to treat staff working in the region's war zones. The United Nations has a similar service there.

From "Postmark: Rwanda" by Vivienne Walt, Newsday, August 3, 1994

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Using the accompanying maps, locate and fill in the names of the following countries: Mozambique, Malawi; Burma (now Myanmar), Bangladesh; Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia (parts of the former Yugoslavia); Somalia, Rwanda.

2. If you were working for a nongovernmental organization (NGO) on behalf of refugees, which would you rather do: work directly with refugees in the field, or work as a spokesperson for them in the United States? Why? What appeals to you about this work?

3. Describe what you see as the most serious impact of the refugee presence in Malawi and Bangladesh. What kind of tensions can you imagine arising between citizens of a host country and refugees sheltering there? What might a host country do to discourage future refugees from seeking shelter within its borders?

4. After reading all the selections, what do you think are the most important forms of assistance, care, and protection that UNHCR and the NGOs can provide to refugees in emergency situations and to refugees going home to war-ravaged countries?

This publication of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children's Voices Project is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.
Interviews were written and then edited by Ann Armstrong. All photos supplied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

CHAPTER FOUR

Still in Danger in Their Own Countries

Internally Displaced People

Internally displaced people

People who have fled their homes to seek safety, but who remain somewhere within their own countries because they are unwilling or unable to cross an international border. This means that they are technically still under the jurisdiction of their own governments, and thus generally beyond the assistance of the international community.

Perhaps the unluckiest of all those forced to flee their homes to save their lives are the ***internally displaced***. For a variety of reasons, such people cannot escape the conflict by crossing the border, and thus they remain trapped within their own countries. They may already have suffered terribly at the hands of their governments, or their governments may simply be too weak to protect them from the violence and chaos raging around them. In either case, they are technically ineligible for international aid and protection because they are still legally under their own nations' jurisdiction. Though they are just as frightened and in need of care and protection as "official" refugees, they will be much less likely to receive it.

The origin of the distinction between refugees and internally displaced people is the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This 1951 agreement defines a refugee as any person who, "owing to a well-founded fear or persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unwilling or unable to avail himself of the protection of that country."

This definition, designed to ensure that the United Nations respects individual nations' authority within their own borders, has meant that displaced people the world over have often remained beyond the reach of UNHCR

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help. In recent years, however, the complete breakdown of law and order in places like Somalia and the former Yugoslavia has created opportunities for UNHCR to broaden its mission and provide aid to those still in danger within their own countries.

The following readings describe the difficulties faced by internally displaced families in war-torn Azerbaijan, Rwanda, and Sudan. As you read them, compare and contrast their problems with those of "official" refugees who have escaped to a neighboring country.

THE PAIN OF BEING AN EXILE WITHIN HIS OWN COUNTRY IS EVIDENT ON THE FACE OF THIS AZERI MAN WHO, WITH HIS FAMILY, HAS HAD TO TAKE SHELTER IN AN OLD TRAILER

The North Is Alien to Them

A young relief worker, herself a refugee from Eritrea, describes the plight of southern Sudanese living as internally-displaced people in the northern part of their country

Today the displaced are seen as more alien to the Sudanese than we Eritreans. The concern about the presence of strangers has shifted to the southerners.

As a refugee, I understand many of their concerns and fears. They have passed through the same traumas as we. In a way the displaced are crossing a border coming from the south to the north. The north is alien for them. The environment, weather, language, religion, customs, traditions—all are unfamiliar, all are barriers to their being welcome in the north.

The vast majority of them do not speak Arabic, and most of them are farmers, not urban dwellers. Many from the villages have never seen a car or a tarmac road. Some get killed simply because they do not know how to walk around in a town....

The feeling of living a temporary existence has a detrimental effect on the structure of the family. No one sinks roots. Every shelter has a transient air, as though those who live within will depart momentarily. Yet this temporariness can last for years and years.

The displaced enter into illegal means for making money by brewing beer, gambling, hustling illegal goods, or working as prostitutes just to make ends meet. They go through much degradation. At home they are independent; they have a patch of land and some animals. Here they have nothing....

It is very depressing to make visits to the slum areas where they have built their shanty towns. As many as fifteen people live in an area no larger than 4 by 4 meters [13 by 13 feet]. When we made our health survey in one of the fringe camps, most of the children were malnourished. Many of them weighed 85 percent or less of weight for height. Whatever the displaced earn in wages, it seems they can't give their families more than one substantial meal a day. Many cannot even give that.

Those of us who are refugees know we are in bad shape. Yet for the displaced it is worse. The fact that they are Sudanese hinders them from getting special care from the United Nations or international organizations. No one can plead their case. Those relief agencies who do have some access to the displaced find that it is really beyond their capacity to do anything that will really make a difference for them. No help we give shows any remarkable effects. They need more help than any relief agencies can give.

Tesega, Eritrean refugee and relief worker, quoted in Disposable People? The Plight of Refugees *by Judy Mayotte, Orbis Books, 1992*

Starving in a Camp within Rwanda

In a forgotten corner of their country, fleeing Rwandans run out of food

In a largely forgotten corner of this tiny, devastated nation, the survivors of drought, massacres, and war are now facing the ravages of malnutrition and starvation.

At a makeshift refugee camp for tens of thousands of people living in crude huts on steep slopes, tiny Albert Uwamahoro is one year old. He weighs 12 pounds. His father, a Tutsi, and an older brother and sister were killed in April by a Hutu mob. He was spared because his mother, who was carrying him, is a member of Rwanda's Hutu ethnic majority.

Nearby, five-year-old Habirora sits listlessly, his bulging eyes staring vacantly. He weighs 21 pounds. His family fled their village in eastern Rwanda in May. "Because of the war," says his mother, who has not eaten in a day and to survive at all over the last three months has sold goats, kitchenware and her clothes. "I have nothing left to sell," she said.

While the world focuses on the misery of one million Rwandans who poured into Zaire last month and struggled with death and disease, the plight of the refugees in the southwestern region has steadily worsened. Most began arriving three months ago to escape a civil war and ethnic massacres in the east.

No one here knows for sure how many displaced people there are in this corner of Rwanda, where the French established a "safe haven" measuring 50 by 90 miles in July. Estimates range from 350,000 to 750,000 refugees; most are encamped in an area occupying about a third of the zone....

To survive, Mrs. Mukahigiro has been forced to sell the few things she managed to carry when she fled her village in May. "I have sold all my clothes except this," she said, tugging at a long, tattered piece of cloth she has wrapped around her. "I sold my blanket and my head scarf and three plates," she said. She said her husband had also sold his clothes.

From "Starvation Threatens a Rwanda 'Safe Haven'" by Raymond Bonner, New York Times, August 7, 1994

THE FUTURE IS UNKNOWN FOR THIS GRACEFUL YOUNG GIRL, NOW LIVING IN A CAMP FOR THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED IN SOMALIA. [INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE]

FOR THIS SOMALI MOTHER AND HER CHILDREN, HOME IS A MAKESHIFT TENT OF STICKS AND BLANKETS.

We Are Refugees in Our Own Country

A teenager talks about the suffering and contradictions of life for her internally displaced family in Azerbaijan

We live in one whitewashed room in a building that used to serve as a school dormitory. A local refugee committee assigned it to us. There are eight of us. My mother, my older sisters, and their children. My sisters' husbands were left behind. Mahmud was shot at from behind by the enemy soldiers that came into our town at around 6:00 a.m. Miraculously, he was still alive, but we could not reach him. A half an hour later, my other sister's husband left our temporary hiding place to rescue Mahmud. We didn't see either of them again. About a week ago, we heard through the Red Cross that Mahmud had died and our other brother-in-law had been taken hostage. My father has since been recruited by our country's army to fight our enemy.

It is strange that we serve on our land, on our side of the border in our army, recruited by our government, and yet we are refugees in our own country. At least we have stopped running for now. After we fled our home about four months ago, we made four stops of a few weeks each.

Farhad is the youngest member of our family at three years old. Since we fled our town, he has not spoken. He only murmurs and rocks back and forth in a corner of our room. He used to sing with the birds. My mother says he was frightened by the fire. When the soldiers came into our town, they burned everything in their path—animals, trees, homes, stores, and people. Farhad, as did we all, saw this.

Shovket, fourteen-year-old Azeri girl, in testimony given to volunteers of the International Azerbaijan Research and Development Institute, 1992

LIKE REFUGEES, THE DISPLACED ARE "ON HOLD" WHILE THEY TRY TO RECOVER, MOURN THEIR LOSSES, AND WORRY ABOUT THE FUTURE. (ELIZABETH RAPPAPORT)

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Using the accompanying maps, locate and fill in the names of the following countries: Azerbaijan (a breakaway republic of the former Soviet Union); Rwanda; Sudan; Eritrea (formerly part of Ethiopia).

2. Two of the selections describe the terrible conditions experienced by people in camps for the displaced in Rwanda and Sudan. In what ways might their situations improve if UNHCR and other international humanitarian organizations were free to assist them?

3. What problems do the internally displaced share with "official" refugees? How do their problems differ?

4. In your own words, explain the difference between refugees and internally displaced people. What impact has this distinction had on the treatment available by the latter?

5. What was the original intention behind the distinction made between the two? What arguments could be made in favor of this intention?

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Introductions written and stories edited by Ann Armstrong Craig. All photos supplied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER FIVE

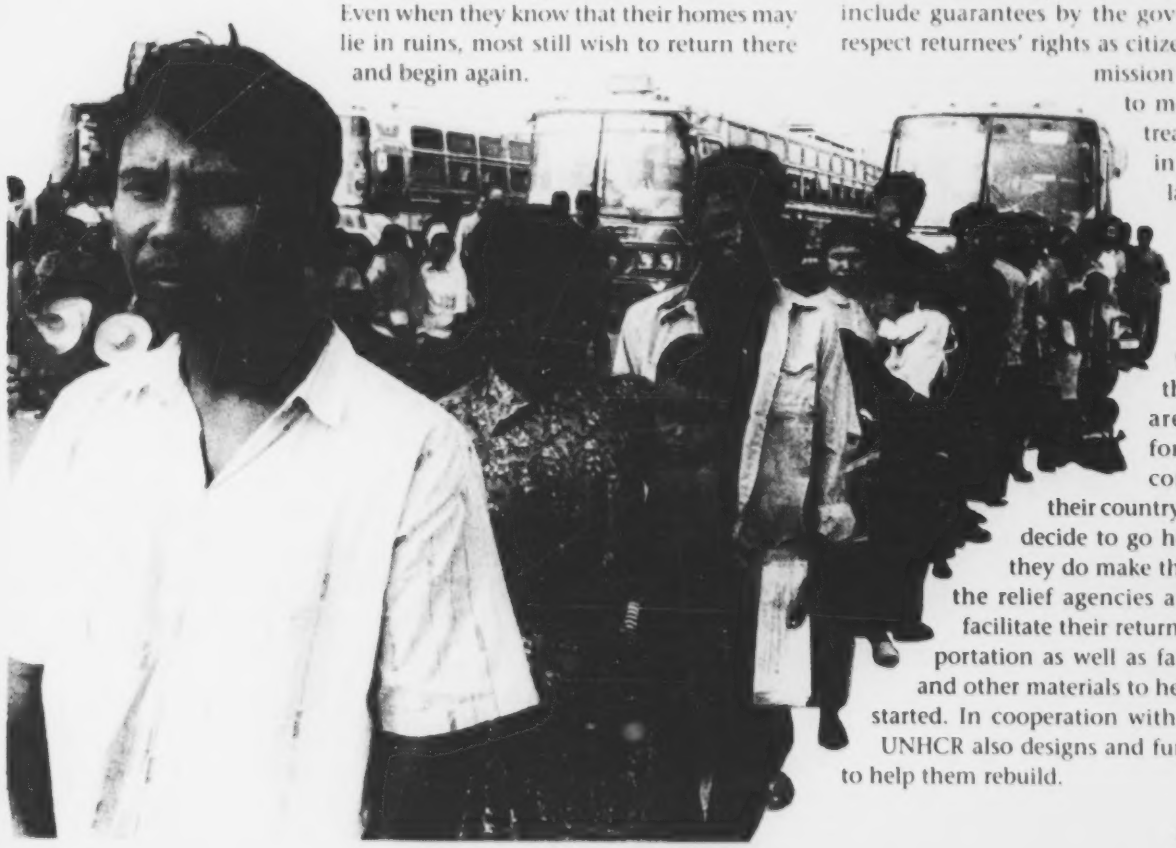
Going Home to Face New Challenges

Voluntary Repatriation

Voluntary repatriation
The return of refugees to their homeland of their own free will.

In exile, refugees and displaced people keep alive the memory of all they have left behind — their fields and farms, their churches, mosques, or temples, their parks and streets and gathering places. Above all else, they miss crossing the threshold of their own homes, the places where they laughed and cried, lived with their families, and kept the things they cherished most. Even when they know that their homes may lie in ruins, most still wish to return there and begin again.

Voluntary repatriation—returning to one's homeland by choice—is the best solution to a refugee's need for a home. It means going back to the land where one belongs, to a familiar culture and lifestyle, landscape and climate. To make this possible, UNHCR and the *nongovernmental organizations* (NGOs) concerned with refugees work to ensure the conditions necessary for a safe return. These include guarantees by the government to respect returnees' rights as citizens and permission for UNHCR to monitor their treatment back in their homeland.



UNHCR and the NGOs also try to ensure that refugees are fully informed about conditions in their country before they decide to go home. When they do make that decision, the relief agencies and UNHCR facilitate their return with transportation as well as farming tools and other materials to help them get started. In cooperation with the NGOs, UNHCR also designs and funds projects to help them rebuild.

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Voluntary Repatriation

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Ideally, refugees return home only when it is completely safe for them to do so. In reality, they often go home before peace is fully achieved. Their impatience is understandable. Perhaps they find conditions in exile very difficult, or they think their children are losing their cultural identity, or they see little chance of peace in their homeland in the near future. Whatever the reason, they are anxious to go home if they can.

In most cases, going home means facing devastation on a monumental scale. Not only do homes and villages lie in ruins; so do schools, roads, and hospitals, water, sewer, and electrical systems. There may also be the problem of not enough land and water to go around in safe areas—and the problem of someone else having taken over people's land in the meantime.

Perhaps the most sinister danger facing returning refugees is the presence of land mines. Usually planted by all the warring factions, at least 100 million mines remain buried just below the surface in nations all over the world. In country after country, refugees and their children are returning home to face this ever-present danger. Many become amputees.

The following selections—about refugees returning to Mozambique, Cambodia, Eritrea, and Guatemala—provide some idea of the range of joys and problems that face returning refugees.

Hope and Sadness Mingle as Repatriation Begins

For returning Mozambicans, going home is a bittersweet experience

Since October 1992, when the peace treaty putting an end to 16 years of civil war in Mozambique was signed in Rome, almost 350,000 refugees have returned from Malawi. . . .

One hour later than scheduled, the crowded train pulled away from the station to thunderous applause and shouts which completely drowned out the noise of the engines and the train's whistle. A crowd of curious onlookers, family members, and other refugees—the latter particularly interested in this first repatriation—had gathered to see the departure. Among them was a woman in her thirties. Bitterness and sadness were etched on her face as she watched the train disappear down the tracks. But it would soon be her turn. . . .

Poignant scenes awaited the returnees at their destination. The train journey had lasted only four hours. All of the refugees came from the Boane district, half an hour by road from the capital, Maputo. Arlindo, a 50-year-old farmer, couldn't hide his impatience. "I've lost my whole family. My only hope is to get back my land," he said. "What shall I do if I find that it's occupied by other people? I shall simply tell them that the owner is back now."

The arrival was also marked by some agonizing scenes. Some returnees failed to find their families, and were instead met by friends, who told them that their relatives had disappeared. Others found their homes in ruins.

But all of them returned with the same hope: to rebuild their lives even if it meant starting again from nothing.

From "Journey's End" by Jean-Victor Nkolo, UNHCR's Refugees *magazine, December 1993*

RETURNING REFUGEES OFTEN HAVE TO REBUILD THEIR DEVASTATED HOMES AND COMMUNITIES. THIS FAMILY IN CROATIA FACES SUCH A CHALLENGE - WITH NO GUARANTEE THAT THE FIGHTING WILL NOT BEGIN AGAIN

IT IS THE DREAM OF MOST REFUGEES – EVEN THOSE BORN IN CAMPS – TO GO BACK TO THEIR OWN COUNTRIES ONE DAY. THESE YOUNG CAMBODIANS ARE ON THEIR WAY HOME DURING THE MAJOR REPATRIATION TO CAMBODIA IN 1993.

Silent Killers Lie in Wait

In countries all over the world, returning refugees are being maimed and killed by these hidden weapons

As refugees return to villages in Cambodia, Mozambique, and Afghanistan after long years in refugee camps, they confront abandoned land made deadly by millions of mines. For too many, repatriation has meant being maimed or killed during the first weeks back home.

Ironically, because of the manner in which they have come to be deployed, land mines do discriminate in choosing their victims; they consistently kill the poorest citizens in these destitute nations. Those who are so hungry that they must forage firewood for sale or risk their lives to retrieve a gallon of water in areas known to be littered with mines, are at greatest risk. In these countries, mine injuries constitute a public health epidemic among the poor. In Cambodia, where there are an estimated four million land mines, fewer than half the victims survive of the 1,000 new mine injuries each month. In Cambodia, one out of every 230 people is an amputee.

Among this luckless group, women and children comprise 30 percent of land mine casualties. And because children's small size places their vital organs closer to the explosion, they are most commonly killed. Thus, women are widowed, children are ripped apart, farmers are crippled, and refugees' dreams of a new life are shattered while industrial giants such as Fiat, with its large stake in the Italian mine industry, literally make a killing.

From "Halting the Hidden Killers" by Dr. Anne E. Goldfeld and Holly Meyers, members of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, The Boston Globe, *June 2, 1994*

Is This Really Ours? It's Beautiful!

A Cambodian family returns to find good news and bad

The pickup truck zigzags along the trail deeply furrowed by the recent rains. All the members of the Veng family are crouched down so as not to fall amidst the heavy load of furniture, plastic bags, and other luggage that constitutes their whole wealth. As they gradually approach their village of origin, emotions run high as the parents wonder what they will find. Will anyone remain—family, friends, neighbors—among those they had once known? Even before going to the village chief, the father heads immediately, as if driven by instinct, to where his house once stood. They find it. But all that remains are a few wild banana trees peeking through a thicket of bushes and undergrowth that has taken possession of the land where they once lived. A red marker with a skull and the words "Danger, Mines" attached to a nearby tree suggests that it is best not to approach too closely.

As with 368,000 other Cambodians who for the past 10 to 15 years have sought refuge in improvised camps along the Thai frontier, the Veng family can at last return home. Although the parents are visibly upset by the condition of their home, the eldest son, who is 13 years old, is excited. "Is this really ours? It's beautiful!" Throughout his entire life, all that he has known is a refugee camp. A sort of town, which is not really one, with similar-looking houses surrounded by barbed wire. The camp in which he was born. "That's right, this is our home."

Recovering from his initial disappointment, the father has already taken a decision. "This is my land. I'll clear it, I'll clear the mines myself and I'll rebuild my house. And then I'll cut the bananas and plant others. There is water. The land is good. It's here and only here that I want to live."

From "Landmines and Demining in Cambodia" by Annick Roulet, Crosslines, *June 1993*

Not So Simple

For these Eritreans, return means facing many problems

So many of us were so eager to return to our homes, but it was not as simple as we had supposed. . . . After we learned about the dreadful condition of our village, we decided we had better remain in Teseney for a while. Those of us who were refugees went to the edge of the village to build whatever shelter we could. I saw that some who had been there six months or more built round shelters of mud and stone, the sort we lived in before the war. My sons don't know how to build that sort of structure, and I am not sure I remember. It has been so many years. . . .

There is little left of Teseney's hospital. By the time we arrived, we were told that only one physician, four nurses, one midwife, and 15 health assistants served a population of 60,000 to 70,000 people. . . .

Food in Teseney is as scarce as it is in the rest of the country. Almost the whole country depends on relief assistance. The drought is very bad right now, and with the war just over, we have very few resources to try to feed ourselves. . . .

Medhanie, returning Eritrean refugee quoted in Disposable People? The Plight of the World's Refugees, *by Judy Mayotte, Orbis Books, 1992*

Will There Be Enough Land?

Guatemalan refugees returning home face a serious problem of land scarcity

[The area] chosen by these returnees as their final destination is an undeveloped agricultural region close to the conflict area and near the Mexican border. . . ." Said Juan Coq, one of the refugee leaders, "We know the land [at our destination] can only sustain some 200 families, and 90 families are already living there. But the number of people who are now going back is over 500 families."

Marcos Morales Sales, 30, asked whether he had any land title, answered: "Yes, my father has it, but we really don't know whether that will be enough to get our land back. We know someone else is occupying it. We don't hold a grudge against him, though, because he's just a poor peasant like us, trying to survive. It's up to the government to find a solution for both him and us. We don't want to go back to Guatemala to fight with our brothers who are occupying our land."

From "Journey to Ixcan" by Sylvia Girard, UNHCR's Refugees *magazine, April 1993*

AFTER MANY YEARS OF WAR AND TURMOIL, AFGHANISTAN'S SCHOOLS LIE IN RUINS. HERE, RETURNING AFGHAN CHILDREN TAKE CLASSES IN A MAKESHIFT SCHOOL.

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Using the accompanying maps, locate and fill in the names of the following countries: Cambodia; Mozambique; Guatemala; Eritrea (formerly part of Ethiopia); Afghanistan.

2. What do you think would be the most important thing a family would want to know before making the decision to return home? Can you understand how people might make that decision even if peace had not been achieved yet? What pros and cons would you weigh if it were up to you to make the decision?

3. Of all the returnees' problems described in these selections, which seem to you the most serious and long-lasting, and why?

4. If you were a refugee and were informed that you would encounter some or all of these problems back home, would you still prefer to return there rather than look for asylum somewhere else in the world? Why or why not?

5. How would you deal with the discovery that your home was being lived in by someone else, or that your land was mined?

6. Who do you think should be responsible for removing land mines?

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CHAPTER SIX

The Hardships of Relocation

Local Integration and Third-Country Resettlement

Local integration

The permanent relocation of refugees in the country where they first sought refuge.

Resettlement

Refugees' permanent relocation to a third country that is neither their homeland nor the host country where they first found refuge.

Many people think that, instead of going home to their own lands or staying in the host countries they've fled to, most refugees seek asylum in a third country like the United States. The truth is, only a small percentage of refugees seek asylum in third countries, and of those who do, only a tiny fraction are approved for ***resettlement***.

Of course, most refugees' dearest wish is to return home to their countries. This is known as *voluntary repatriation*. But when it is simply too dangerous for refugees to go home, many seek to remain in the host countries where they first found refuge. This solution, known as ***local integration***, entails their acceptance by the host country's government for permanent settlement there. By remaining in a land neighboring their own, refugees can sometimes enjoy a few of the same conditions they had at home – a landscape, lifestyle, and language not so very different from their own.

For some refugees, both returning home and settling in the host country are out of the question. For such people, resettlement in a third country may be the only possible solution. The question is, can they find a country that will take them?

From the standpoint of many countries, refugees are seen as an increasingly unwelcome burden. Throughout the world,

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the lasting economic recession and a scarcity of jobs have fueled a growing xenophobia, or fear and resentment of foreigners. According to *UNHCR's State of the World's Refugees 1993*, "In some countries, incidents of criminal violence against asylum seekers have risen by as much as 400 percent in the early 1990s." Many countries have tightened restrictions relating to refugee admission.

Concern about the possibility that some economic migrants are falsely portraying themselves as refugees has led to similar measures being taken in the United States and Canada. (Note: Few people know of the important distinction between *refugees* and *economic migrants*. Refugees flee their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution, and only seek resettlement in another country when it continues to be unsafe for them to go home. Economic migrants choose to emigrate out of a desire to improve their way of life.)

Approximately one million refugees do win asylum in third countries around the world each year. What is it like to be among the lucky few who receive approval, resettle far from home, and become "strangers in a strange land"?

The next selections will give you different glimpses of the issue of resettlement: the climate of opinion leading to the current raising of barriers against refugees; the anguish of a family seeking asylum somewhere, *anywhere*; and the struggle of a young Vietnamese woman and her family to start a new life in a new country.

Like Swimming Underwater

The author, now Director of Refugee Programs for Save the Children, vividly describes her family's struggle to survive in Canada after fleeing Vietnam

On the night of April 29th, 1975, I was on a barge packed with refugees, floating down the Saigon River trying to reach international waters. Fierce fighting was going on, on both sides of the river, and the sky was red with fire. By early morning we had reached the Pacific Ocean and heard over a portable radio that the communists had taken control of South Vietnam. I could still see the coast of my homeland but it was not mine anymore. I did not cry and I was not afraid. Fear is when airplanes fly over your neighborhood and your body shakes uncontrollably and the next bomb could be on your house.... The first time I cried was a week later in a refugee camp in Guam.....

My first year in Montreal, Canada, was mostly spent on survival. There was no time for deep thinking or feelings. My father, who had been a successful businessman in Vietnam, discovered he could not even get a job as a bookkeeper. My mother, who ran the complex family business, could not even get a driving license due to the language barrier. I speak English and French, had an American university degree, but could not even get a job as a bank teller or cashier at the supermarket. I finally got my first job as a receptionist at a small company two hours away from the city. My brothers and sisters delivered pizza at night in the Canadian winter with light jackets, no boots, and a cheap unreliable car. We felt like we were always swimming underwater. Yet every night, we counted our blessings. We were all alive and the family was intact.

It was only by the third year that we started to feel alive....For the first time since I had escaped Vietnam, I had time to wonder about my future. "Is this how I wanted to spend my life? Where did I want to go, where did I want to be in ten years?" Somehow all the answers were: "Back home."

When does a refugee stop being a refugee? I stopped being a refugee the day I took back control of my life. The guilt will always be there, every day, and worst on holidays when I wonder, why me, what makes me so different that I am here in this comfortable life and not rotting at the bottom of the ocean or in a refugee camp? The nightmares will always be there. But I thank God every day for giving me this second chance.

From "A Refugee Story" by Xuan Nguyen Sutter, Women's Commission News, *February 1994*

AT AN OFFICE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS IN FRANCE, REFUGEES FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA RECEIVE HELP IN FINALIZING THEIR APPLICATIONS FOR ASYLUM

Where on Earth Can They Go From Here?

In the novel, Kiss the Dust, a moment comes when a Kurdish refugee's family from Iraq finds itself in just as much in danger in Iran

"We must leave now, at once," Kak Soran said. Teriska Khan was speechless. She couldn't take it in.

"Leave Iran at once?" she said stupidly. "What do you mean? Where can we go?"

"Daban's boy Rezgar [phoned] last night," he said wearily. "France is out of the question. They've tightened up on refugees. I've heard the same story all over the place. It's going to be incredibly difficult to get in anywhere. Germany, Sweden, Norway, Britain —they take a few, then they bring the shutters down again."

"What about Canada?"

"Canada?" Kak Soran shrugged. "Forget it. It's almost as hopeless as the United States, and you might as well try to get to the moon as get in there. We'll just have to get our exit papers in order, and get on a flight to Europe, and claim asylum wherever we can."

Teriska Khan was looking more and more agitated.

"But we can't go to any European country just like that! They might refuse to take us, or send us on somewhere else. The stories I've heard! People sometimes go traveling round for weeks, from one airport to another, not allowed to stop anywhere!"

From Kiss the Dust *by Elizabeth Laird, Penguin Books, 1992*

A FAMILY OF ARMENIAN REFUGEES, LIVING IN ONE SMALL ROOM AND SUSPENDED BETWEEN THEIR PAST AND THEIR FUTURE. WHERE ON EARTH WILL THEY GO FROM HERE?

The Message is: You Are Not Welcome Here

The United States:

The Americans tell us to go back to our own country. I say we don't have a country to go back to. I wish I was born here and nobody would fight me and beat me up. They don't understand. I want to tell them that if they had tried to cross the river and were afraid of being caught and killed and lost their sisters, they might feel like me, they might look like me, and they, too, might find themselves in a new country.

Fifteen-year-old Cambodian boy quoted in Crossing the Schoolhouse Border, *by Laurie Olsen, California Tomorrow, 1988*

Germany:

First came the crash of a firebomb. Then the roar of spreading flames. And finally, the phone call: "Fire in Ratzeburger Street! Heil Hitler!" Those words, called in to the fire department in the small Baltic town of Mölln, resounded across Germany last week. They announced much more than the arson attack that killed two Turkish girls and a 51-year-old grandmother. They were a cry of rightist revolt that jolted Germans into a frightening realization: the 1,800 attacks this year on foreigners and Jewish monuments can no longer be described as the random vandalism of a minority of alienated youths in the formerly communist states of eastern Germany.

From "Germany's Furies", by Charles Lane and Karen Breslau, Newsweek, *December 7, 1992*

Russia:

Uprooted from their countries by civil war and persecution, and lacking the visas and connections to travel to a more prosperous country, refugees from the Caucasus, Afghanistan, Somalia, and other countries used to find safe haven here.

"Moscow was the only place we could even think of coming to," said Vadim Khachaturyan, an Armenian refugee who arrived in 1989 from Azerbaijan. "It was the capital of the Soviet Union, the seat of law, and we thought we would be protected here."

Yet today, just 10 months after Russia formally agreed to abide by the United Nations' *Refugee Convention and Protocol*, Moscow is trying to close its doors to non-Russians. Refugees like Mr. Khachaturyan, who arrived in Moscow wearing the slippers in which he fled, are facing new pressures to pack their bags again and move.

From "Refugees Find That Moscow Withdraws Its Welcome", by Judith Ingram, New York Times, *December 24, 1993*

Putting Up the Barriers

Attitudes toward foreigners are changing in some countries, and so are their refugee policies

Many industrialized states have introduced increasingly tough measures to prevent people from abusing asylum procedures for immigration purposes. While reflecting legitimate concern over irregular immigration, such measures can raise obstacles for people in genuine need of asylum.

Procedures devised to prevent entry or simplify expulsion are numerous. They include heavy policing, as on the eastern borders of Austria, and legal or administrative provisions for rejection of unwelcome visitors before they cross the frontier. . . .In June 1992, a U.S. Presidential Executive Order allowed the summary return of all Haitian boat people intercepted on the high seas without any examination of their asylum claims. In May 1993, Germany—which in 1992 received more asylum seekers than all the other European countries combined—revised its constitution to permit asylum seekers to be sent back to neighboring countries considered by the German authorities to be safe countries of asylum. . . .

The return of an asylum seeker to a safe country is not, in principle, objectionable. But when it occurs without the consent of the country concerned, asylum seekers may end up "in orbit," shuttling between airports or railway stations only to be refused admission at each successive destination.

From "Obstacles to Asylum," The State of the World's Refugees 1993, *by UNHCR, Penguin Books, 1993*

THIS REFUGEE, FORMERLY A JOURNALIST IN VIETNAM, FOUND ASYLUM IN SWITZERLAND, WHERE HE NOW WORKS IN AN ENGINE ASSEMBLY PLANT.

AT A RECEPTION CENTER IN ITALY, A VIETNAMESE COUPLE AWAITS RELOCATION. FINDING A WELCOMING COUNTRY IS DIFFICULT; STARTING LIFE OVER CAN BE JUST AS HARD.

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Using the accompanying map, locate and fill in the names of the following countries: Austria, Haiti; Cambodia; Iraq, Iran; Germany, Russia; Vietnam, Canada.

2. What is xenophobia? After reading the group of newspaper extracts under the heading "Putting Up the Barriers," discuss the impact of xenophobia on individual refugees and/or its possible link to changing refugee policies in at least one of the countries mentioned.

3. In "Where on Earth Can They Go from Here?" a Kurdish family must deal with a crisis that faces many desperate refugees. Describe their dilemma in your own words. Use the information provided in at least one of the other readings in your explanation.

4. After reading "Like Swimming Under Water," what advice do you think the author might give young refugees to help them during their first years in a new country? What experiences of her own might she draw on in giving this advice?

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CHAPTER SEVEN

When the New Country is America

Refugees in the United States

Refugee status
An official designation granted by the U.S. government to people who meet the official U.N. definition of a refugee. Generally they must apply for this status in the host countries currently sheltering them and are then brought to the United States.

Political asylum
Status sought by people who arrive in the United States first and *then* apply for refuge, if they meet the official United Nations definition of a refugee.

Imagine telling your friends in the crowded refugee center where you live that you and your family have been granted ***refugee status*** in America. At last, after filling out endless forms and waiting and hoping and being disappointed and waiting some more, your prayers have been answered and the doors to freedom have swung open. Imagine your excitement as you prepare for your departure and say your goodbyes. The years of fear and anguish are finally behind you, and you are about to begin a new life in a new land.

But there can be another, darker side to this anticipation. Imagine leaving the only part of the world you know, a place whose climate, culture, traditions, and expectations are familiar to you, for a faraway land that holds no guarantee of a hospitable welcome. Imagine leaving friends and some of your family behind and setting off for an uncertain future. Imagine suddenly being transported to a place where you do not speak the language, cannot read the street signs, must depend on others for help with things you have always done easily by yourself up to now. Imagine feeling homesick and upset about everything that's happened so far, yet still having to make every effort to help your family survive and start over again.

Each year the President of the United States makes the final decision about the

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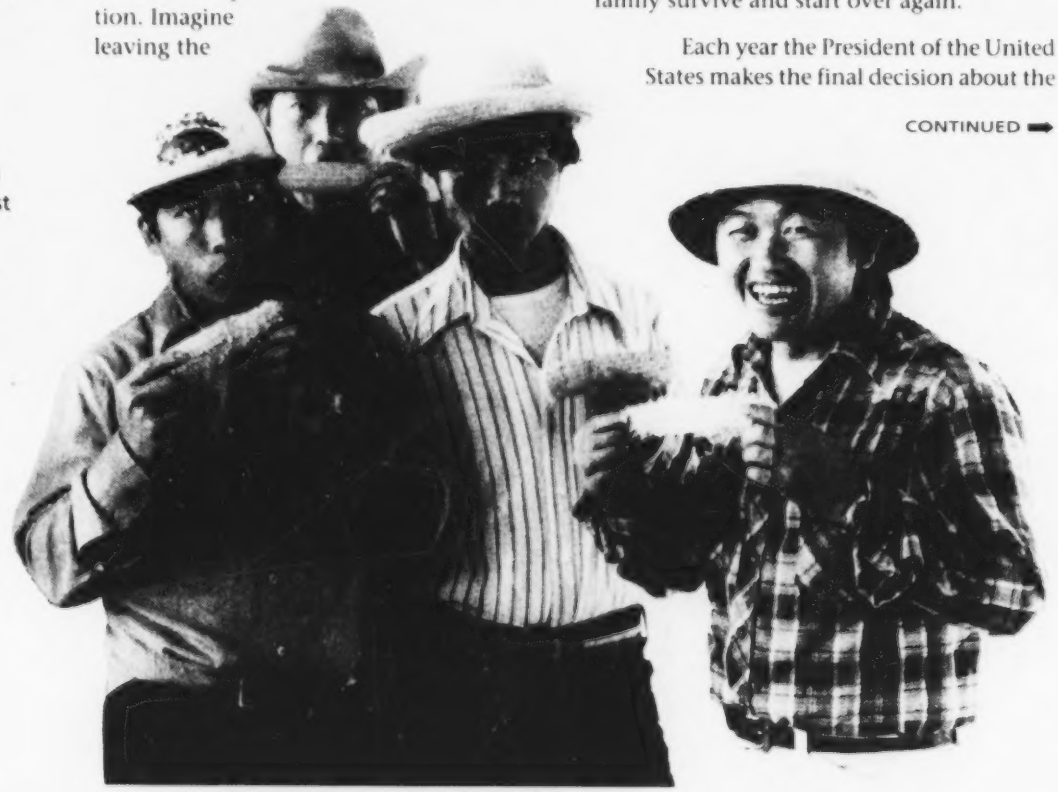

total number of refugees allowed to resettle here. The overall total is broken down into specific allocations for different countries and regions in the world. Traditionally, some countries have benefitted more than others from these allocations because, to a large extent, they mirror current U.S. foreign policies or political priorities. During recent years, for example, fully 80 percent of all refugees resettled in the United States were those fleeing communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Southeast Asia. This was a direct reflection of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War.

It is important to be aware of the two different ways that refugees can legally gain admission to the United States. One way is to obtain refugee status, which refugees generally apply for in the host countries in which they're living. With refugee status, an individual receives many benefits, such as transportation to the United States, cash and medical assistance for a few months, and language and job training. All of these benefits are designed to help the refugees integrate into American society and become self-sufficient. In 1994, the United States will resettle about 120,000 refugees in this country.

The other route is by obtaining ***political asylum*** after entering the United States. Some asylum applicants, like the Haitian boat people who reach our shores any way they can and then apply for asylum, may spend considerable time in detention centers awaiting an official decision. In most cases, the United States does not grant asylum to those who request it. In fact, in 1992, 104,000 individuals applied for asylum. Because of severe understaffing, the Immigration and Naturalization Service only considered 10,000 applications. Of these, only 4,000 individuals were granted asylum, and they received no benefits.

The table below presents the proposed allocations for U.S. refugee status admissions in 1995:

U.S. Refugee Admissions in 1995 as determined by the President

Area of Origin	Proposed Limit
Africa	7,000
East Asia	40,000
Former Soviet Union/ Eastern Europe	48,000
Latin America and the Caribbean	8,000
Near East	5,000
Other	2,000
TOTAL	**110,000**

The next readings provide a glimpse of the high hopes refugees bring with them when they come to America, the difficulties they encounter here, and the kinds of things they notice about life in the United States.

THE GOAL OF REFUGEES IS TO LEAD NORMAL, PRODUCTIVE LIVES IN THEIR NEW LAND. THIS LAOTIAN WOMAN, RESETTLED IN NEW YORK, WORKS IN A CLOTHING FACTORY.

Every Single Refugee Suffers

For this refugee from Guatemala, the language and cultural hurdles brought actual physical pain

Being in the U.S. is even harder than being in Mexico. You face a new language and strange food. Your eyes suffer seeing the system, the luxury in this country, the easy way things are done. You get an upset stomach and diarrhea, and you vomit thinking of the uncertainty. Besides suffering, there is resistance to accepting the new situation, resistance to learning the new language. Refugees are mostly people from the countryside, and they confront difficulties when they move to American cities. Some of them come from areas where there is no electricity. Even if they come from a city, it's a big change. For Guatemalans, it is extremely hard to come here. Sixty percent of the population is Indian, with their own languages. They don't speak Spanish, their second language, very well. They can't read or write, so they have trouble communicating with North Americans, and this gives them more headaches. Sometimes the headaches and the stomach upset take years to go away. Every single refugee suffers.

From an interview with a Guatemalan living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, by Susanne Jonas, a member of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 1988.

What I Like and Don't Like about America

Some observations and insights about living in the United States from a young Bosnian refugee

After we had been refugees in Croatia for a year and a half, my father found out about an organization that helps people come to America. We decided to try because it wasn't easy living in Croatia. We had interviews and then were allowed to come here.

I like America because people here can say what they think and most other people will respect that, even though maybe they don't agree with another's opinion. Here, almost no one asks what nationality you are, and I like that. All that matters is that you be a good person and try to help others. On the other hand, I don't like America because of the big contrast between people, between the rich ones and the homeless ones.

School here is much easier than in Bosnia. The tests are not difficult and there are no oral examinations. Students don't respect the teachers enough and they don't behave well. They eat and drink during class period and some of the teachers do the same. It shouldn't be like that, because discipline is very important. Students here also don't know much about the rest of the world. They only know about America and about nothing else.

I really miss my country and I often think about it. But if somebody asked me if I want to go back, I would say no. Bosnia isn't the same anymore. It's completely destroyed and there is so much hatred between people in it. I just hope that one day everything will be normal again and that the people will again have the chance for a decent life, because everybody in this world has a right to that.

Ajla Potur, fourteen-year-old Bosnian refugee student in Pasadena, California, 1994

I Was Like a Person from Another Planet

For this young refugee, school was a nightmare of feeling "different" and rejected

Since I and other Cambodians did not know how to speak a word of English at first, most of the American people did not want to talk to us because they thought that we were nothing like them. When I walked to school (I knew how to speak a few words of English at that time) I would say "Hi" or I would give a grin to every American student I encountered, but they paid no attention to me at all. They pretended that they didn't hear me. Another time in English class, I didn't understand what the teacher was trying to say so I asked classmates sitting next to me to explain it, but they pretended they were busy. They felt that their friends might laugh at them if they answered me. They acted like that because I was different, I came from another country, spoke broken English, and looked different.

At school I was like a person from another planet. I was totally confused, my ears hurt. I got a headache almost every other day because I couldn't understand what other people were saying. It drove me crazy! After three months, we were put in school. I was then 11 years old, but I was placed in the same classroom with my two younger brothers. That classroom combined all Southeast Asians from first to sixth grade. I was placed in sixth grade, but because I knew very little English, I still had to learn to write my name, color pictures, and other things.

Horng Kouch, refugee from Cambodia quoted in The Far East Comes Near: Autobiographical Accounts of Southeast Asian Students in America *by Lucy Nguyen-Hong-Nhiem and Joel Martin Halpern, University of Massachusetts Press, 1989*

MASTERING A NEW LANGUAGE CAN BE EASIER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE THAN FOR THEIR PARENTS. THIS TEENAGER FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA IS PRACTICING HIS ENGLISH.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

On the Verge of a New Life

For this Somali student, the long-awaited flight to America is the gateway to a new future

This should have been a special day in Utange refugee camp—the day that a big chartered jet was to have taken 470 Somalis to the United States for resettlement and a new life. But a last-minute delay has postponed what was to have been the sixth of seven charter flights to the United States. Those on the list for resettlement will have to wait a little longer for departure day. With each passing day, the emotions grow stronger—the joy of being able to leave Utange is tinged with sadness over the loss of friends and relatives left behind, there is apprehension and fear over what life will bring in a strange land; and there is envy and disappointment among those who have to stay because they were rejected for resettlement.

Guled Salad Jama, a 24-year-old Somali man who has been accepted for resettlement along with 17 others in his family, demonstrates great patience.... He and his family have already been waiting for six months since being accepted for resettlement in the United States. A few more days won't make that much difference.....

"I hope to complete my university education in the United States," he says, noting that he was in his final year at the National University of Somalia when his life was turned upside down by the war. "I majored in English and Arabic."

But Guled knows it won't be easy and that he will have to find work to put himself through school. Even so, after months of boredom in the camp, he is elated at the prospect of working, at the opportunity to take charge of his life again. "This life in the camp is difficult," he says. "People sit here day after day, night after night, doing nothing. Sometimes I look forward to the challenge of struggling to survive...."

Few of those destined for resettlement want to think about the adjustment problems that will inevitably confront them once the initial excitement subsides—the loneliness, the cultural disorientation, the drudgery of day-to-day life and, for some, the shattered dreams. All of that can come later. For now, they are content in the knowledge that soon they will be starting life anew.

From "Worth the Wait" by Millicent Metuli, UNHCR's Refugees *magazine, December 1993*

IT'S IMPORTANT FOR REFUGEES TO BE ABLE TO PRACTICE THEIR RELIGION IN THEIR NEW COUNTRY. HERE, ETHIOPIANS ATTEND A CHURCH SERVICE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

BEING MADE TO FEEL WELCOME CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE TO THOSE IN A NEW COUNTRY. HERE, A REFUGEE FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA SHARES A LAUGH WITH A CO-WORKER

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Using the accompanying maps, locate and fill in the names of the following countries: Somalia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Guatemala.

2. Choose two of the readings by young refugees and compare their experiences at American schools. Can you identify with their feelings and opinions? Why or why not?

3. If you were a teenager new to the United States, what interests, attitudes, tastes, and problems might you share with American teens? What might surprise and/or disturb you most about American schools or way of life here? Why?

4. Do you think the United States should allow more refugees to resettle here? Why or why not? What other changes, if any, would you make in basic U.S. refugee policy?

This publication of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children's Schools Project is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.
Introductions written and stories edited by Ann Armstrong Craig. All photos supplied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Sent Home Against Their Will

Forced Repatriation

Forced repatriation

The return of people seeking political asylum or refugee status to their countries of origin against their wishes.

For those refugees desperate to find asylum in a country far from home, there can be many dark days. They may find themselves detained at some point along the way, virtual prisoners awaiting the results of endless paperwork and postponement, only to be sent home at last against their will.

This outcome, known as ***forced repatriation***, has been the case for some of the many Vietnamese boat people who escaped to Hong Kong and lived there in crowded camps for years awaiting resettlement. This has also been the case for most of the Haitian boat people who have sought refuge in the United States from the harsh oppressions in their homeland.

The summer of 1994 brought a new tide of desperate Haitians trying to reach our shores. They were followed for a short time by a wave of Cubans also trying to get to the United States on flimsy and overcrowded boats and rafts. Many of these would-be refugees were picked up at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard and taken to the American naval base at Guantanamo Bay. Very few of them are likely to be granted political asylum in the United States. Instead, like the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong, they may remain in crowded, government-run detention camps indefinitely.

What some refugees fear most—forced repatriation—can happen when a host country can no longer afford the burden of the refugees within its borders, or when it simply seeks to rid itself of an inconvenient population of foreigners. The readings that follow concern the hardships and heartaches of refugees from Vietnam, Haiti, Cuba, Guatemala, and Burma who are living in detention and/or facing the prospect of being forcibly sent home. What that can mean is poignantly suggested in a poem by a Hong Kong official and in a story about what happened to one Haitian who was sent home against his will.

Reflections After Refusing a Borderline Application for Refugee Status

A member of Hong Kong's Refugee Status Review Board finds many daily decisions heart-wrenching

I didn't believe him—after only one short hour!
Why was I so unwilling to believe his story?
How could I doubt he'd been interrogated,
threatened, beaten, tortured, jailed?
I who lived an easy, well-paid life—in free Hong Kong—
Judged that he'd not been persecuted—back in Viet Nam,
a place to which I've never been!
What do I know of communists—or communism,
or what persecution is—or even poverty?

When was I ever forced to take sides against my will,
live under tyranny, experience civil war?
When did I last suffer for my nationality, my race,
my social group, my faith,
or my political opinion?

My Chief and others of the Board who went to Viet Nam
on tours officially conducted—by communists (!)—
returned convinced that all his fears of persecution\
were no longer justified,
as if time alone had mended all
and the regime had changed!
"Oh! Torture is relative," they said,
"only a matter of degree, for everyone in Viet Nam
is beaten up when held in custody!"

Yet, how was I so sure that all his words were lies?
How could he ever pass our acid tests?
Was I so certain that he only fled
from poverty, not persecution?
Had he not been mortified enough
for me to set him free?

Was my compassion so fatigued
that I denied him the benefit of my doubts?

"Oh!" I said. "I'd heard it all before, from others,
he had been counseled, skillfully,
to fabricate his statement so it fell
within the fivefold definition
of what makes a refugee!"

Think! I forced him back to Viet Nam!
And who'll protect him there?
Can the UNHCR check up
on more than two in twenty who've returned?
(and most of them were volunteers)
But—as I cannot now undo what's done—
all I can do is ask my friends
who still adjudge those yet unscreened
"Please be more generous than I
and give them the benefit of your doubts."

by Hugh Walker, UNHCR's Refugees *magazine, August 1993*

Agree to Go Back, or No Ration Card

A Burmese family is forced to repatriate by an unsympathetic Bangladesh government

December 1, 1992: While the health of the camp has stabilized, the political situation has rapidly deteriorated. The Bangladesh government has run out of patience as a host, and is determined to send the refugees back to Burma. Bangladesh continues to say officially that the refugees will only go back voluntarily, and at high levels I think the government understands that the international community will not tolerate forced repatriation. What they are trying to do is get enough refugees to go home to generate momentum toward flow to Burma.

The intensity of the forced repatriation has picked up. Refugees with minor rule violations have had their ration cards taken and been told that they won't be returned unless they agree to go to Burma. The mother of Jahid Hussain, the tongue-tied boy, had sent her other two children to relatives in another camp because she knew she would accompany Jahid to the hospital for the operation. Somehow she was "discovered" and accused of having a ration card for four people when she in fact was alone with her son. "Agree to go to Burma, or no ration card," she was told. For two months this woman had had a dream that her child might be able to speak, and after seeing her child sit in the lap of a surgeon who said he could do the operation, she was about to be sent back to Burma, where there is no medical care.

IN HONG KONG'S DETENTION CAMPS, LIFE FOR THE THOUSANDS OF BOAT PEOPLE WHO FLED VIETNAM AFTER THE WAR IS CROWDED AND DESPERATE. [WOMEN'S COMMISSION]

From letters home by Michael Curtis, an American doctor working with Burmese refugees in Bangladesh for Doctors Without Borders, 1992

MANY REFUGEES, LIKE THIS YOUNG HAITIAN, REMAIN IN DETENTION INDEFINITELY, INELIGIBLE FOR POLITICAL ASYLUM YET AFRAID TO GO HOME – OR BE SENT HOME. [INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE]

A Different World

The grim outer appearance of a Hong Kong detention center is mirrored by the jail-like conditions inside

Hei Ling Chau is built on a volcanic island that rises up out of the sea. A beautiful island which once housed a leper colony, it now holds convicted Hong Kong criminals and drug addicts—and a detention center for Vietnamese boat people. After ascending a road cut into cliffs that look out to the sea, one enters—through a gate in the one-story high sheet metal and chain link fence that surrounds the center—a different world. Gone from sight are the ocean, the beautiful island, and its vegetation. Inside is nothing but concrete and barracks. The outside world is blocked off by that six-foot barrier of solid metal. Just sky is visible though the double rolls of barbed wire that top Hei Ling Chau's imprisoning fence.

From a report by members of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children delegation to Hong Kong, 1990

The Constant Fear of Forced Return

Having risked their lives to escape from Vietnam, these boat people find they still may be sent home

Our constant fear of being forced to return to Vietnam has created tension and anxiety in each and every one in the camp. It has caused several incidents in which people in the camp have fought with each other—or people have resisted the police for fear of being forced to return. Hong Kong's authority has ignored the cry for help from us, the women and children of the camp. . . We have risked our lives at sea to come here, thinking that we have reached freedom's shore, but now we have to keep sailing.

Testimony given to members of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children by the women of Sek Kong Detention Center, Hong Kong, 1990

I Felt I Could Not Be Honest

A Guatemalan refugee describes his difficult asylum hearing

I felt I could not be honest at the asylum hearing, and I did not feel at liberty to say so. All questions the judge asked me had a double meaning: the answers could have been both "Yes" and "No." Everything in the courtroom was meant to frighten me, to intimidate me, to humiliate me, to throw me out of the country. It seems to me that with these kinds of proceedings, it doesn't matter whether one goes with or without a lawyer.

Guatemalan asylum seeker detained in Boston, Massachusetts, quoted in Immigration Newsletter, *September-October 1985*

The Effects of Detention on Children

Conditions are difficult for Cuban "rafters" detained at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo

In Guantanamo, the children live in a less confined but more chaotic environment, as thousands of refugees arrive almost daily. The constant population growth has led to shortages of milk, medicine, and other supplies as American military units try to manage the camps. There is no school.

Social workers with church agencies that help relocate families say that many children, after spending days vomiting and seasick in cramped boats where all they could do was sit, are now afraid of water or getting on boats. Mental health experts say those who have started normal lives are bound to suffer anxiety and depression while adjusting to their new circumstances.

Detention, these experts say, can aggravate this state because of the confinement and because dreams of prosperity in the United States have been dashed.

From "Degrees of Freedom for Raft Children" by Mireya Navarro, New York Times, *September 7, 1994*

What Happens to Those Sent Home?

A chilling story of the intimidation, menace, and danger that may await those forcibly returned

Pierre, aged 21, comes from a poor suburb of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He claims to have assisted in voter registration for the elections in December 1990, which resulted in the landslide election of President Aristide. At the request of Aristide's party, his family allowed their home to be used as a polling station on election day.

After the coup, he was afraid he would be harmed by the military because of his family's involvement with the elections. He stated that the military actually came to look for him on October 1, so he hid in the mountains for about a month.

Finally, when conditions did not improve, he and his brother departed Haiti by boat on December 13. After three days at sea, his boat was intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard and he was taken to Guantanamo.

After undergoing screening by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service—he told the asylum officer he had left because of the political crisis—he was screened out. On February 1, his name was announced on the public address system at Guantanamo for return to Haiti.

Immediately upon his arrival, he was interviewed by American reporters, who accompanied him home. After the interview, the army came to his house and asked where he had been. He explained that he had been away in Cap Haitien, a city in northern Haiti. The soldiers then stated that they knew he had actually been in Guantanamo and said, "We'll get you!" So that night, the night of his return to Haiti, he left his own house and remained with friends.

On February 13, soldiers appeared at his house looking for him and beat two of his young nieces. His entire family fled to another town further south after soldiers returned to their house, fired shots into the air, and threw rocks at the house.

From "Haitian Democracy and Refugees: Problems and Prospects," a Staff Report prepared for the Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, February 27, 1992

IN MIDSUMMER 1994, A WAVE OF CUBAN REFUGEES TOOK TO SEA IN EVERYTHING FROM SMALL BOATS TO MERE RAFTS. [INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE]

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Using the accompanying maps, locate and fill in the names of the following countries: Burma (now Myanmar), Bangladesh; Vietnam, Hong Kong; Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti.

2. Why might a host country want to begin returning the refugees it has been sheltering? How might such conflicts be resolved before they lead to forced repatriations?

4. Do you think that if refugees being held in detention or sent home against their will, had known in advance what disappointment and suffering lay in store for them they would have set out on their search for asylum? Why or why not?

3. In "Reflections After Refusing a Borderline Application for Refugee Status," the author expresses his regrets about his decision. Why is he so anxious and sorry? Can you identify with his feelings? Why or why not?

5. Does the system for determining whether or not refugees qualify for political asylum seem fail-safe to you? What could be the results for a refugee when a mistake is made? How do you think the system could be improved?

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Hopeful, Fearful, Far from Home

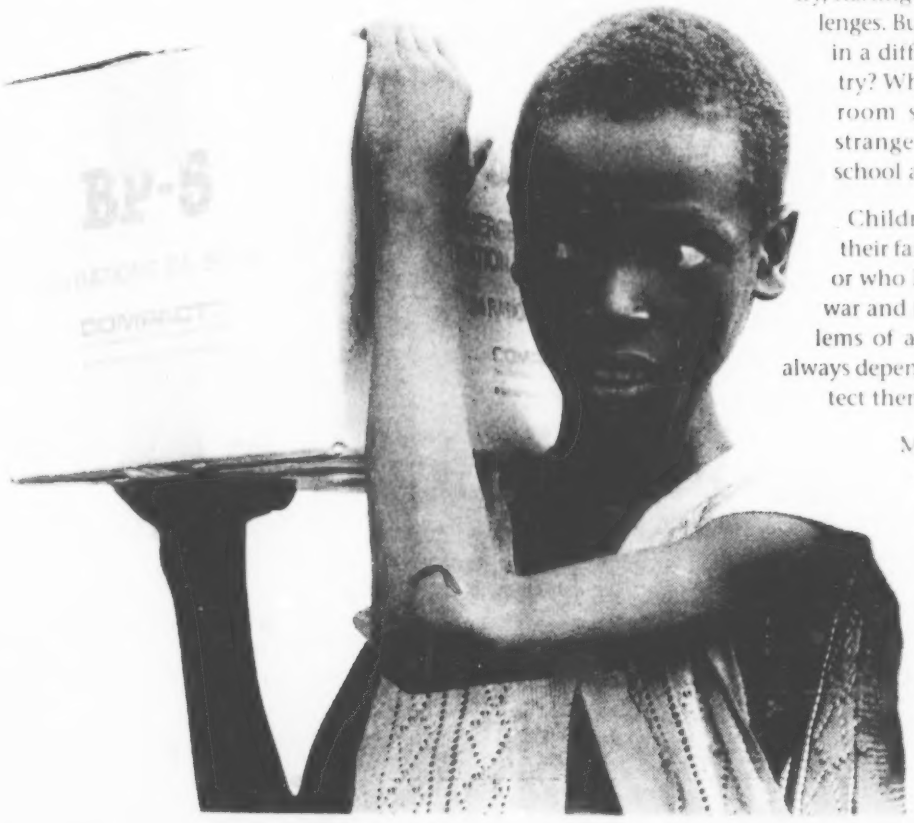
CHAPTER NINE

Refugee Kids Talk About Their Lives

Many students read the story of Anne Frank at some point in school. One of the things that surprises people is how normal she seems despite the terrible conditions of her life during World War II. Though she and her family are living in hiding and are in daily fear of being killed by the Nazis, she not only writes about the impact of war, but also about everyday things like her arguments with her mother, the books she's studying, and how she feels about the boy in her life.

As you'll see from this chapter's readings, the same is true for refugee kids around the world. Like Anne, they are living through intense and frightening experiences. But also like Anne, they're focused on the future and on day-to-day things in the present. Not surprisingly, that includes school, friendships, and family relationships, as well as the hardships and heartaches of their new lives as refugees.

As any American teenager knows whose family has recently relocated to another part of this country, starting a new school can mean many challenges. But what if that new school is not just in a different city, but in a different country? What if that school is just a makeshift room set up in a refugee center? Or, strangest of all, what if there isn't any school at all?



Children and teenagers who have lost their families—who have seen them killed, or who have been separated from them by war and flight—face the most painful problems of all. Without the people they have always depended on to care for, defend, and protect them, they must fend for themselves.

Many, like the Bosnian teenagers described in "Orphans in Sarajevo," or the thousands of Rwandan children who lost their parents in the chaos of the camps, end up in refugee orphanages. Currently, a coalition of relief agencies headed by UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross, is creating a database of names, of both lost children and of the people who are look-

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ing for them. The idea is to use computers to cut the time it takes to locate a child's relations from years to months. Even so, many refugee young people will probably grow up without families.

Some children, like those described in "The Lost Boys of Sudan," have become swept up in the political and military turmoil of their native lands. Yet even these thousands of rootless youngsters are eager to have the benefits of schooling and all it can mean for their future.

Orphans in Sarajevo

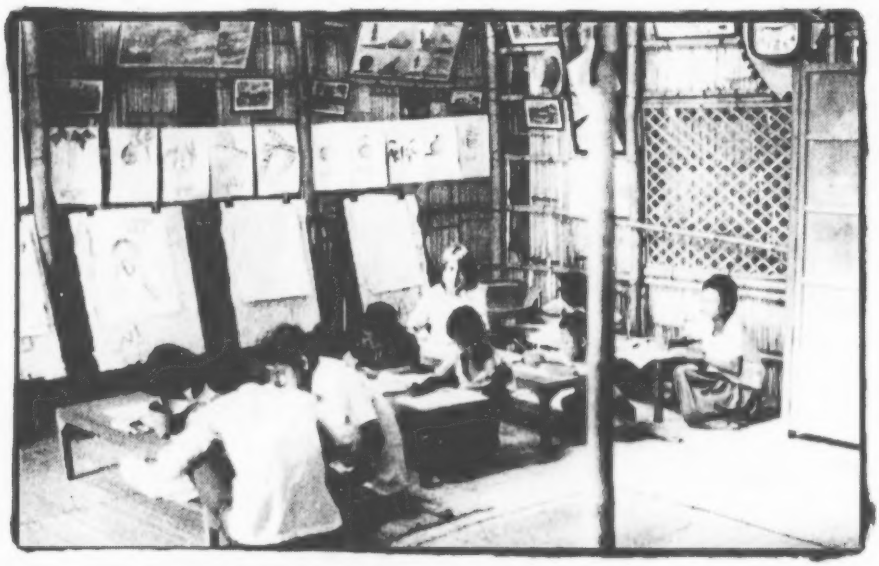
Growing up in the middle of a war zone without parental care or control

They play outside in a garbage-strewn yard littered with bloody rags. They point to a hill in clear view where Serb artillery positions are sounding off their guns. The walls are evidence of that—they are gouged with craters and bullet holes. They sleep on torn mattresses. Dinner is in the basement; it is a kind of gruel.

The children are rampaging with undirected energy. They play with handmade guns and slingshots. When a visitor comes by, they try to pick his pockets. They take everything they can. If they're caught, they will slyly give some of what they took back. Maybe they are looking for something other than objects. . . . Some are orphaned by the war and some not. Conditions for them all, though, have significantly decayed since the war.

Amidst all this they are smiling, wild kids. Sometimes the teenagers take control. But most of the time they lie in bed, listening to music.

Caption for one of the pictures taken at a Sarajevo orphanage by photographer Robin Graubard, 1994



SCHOOL ISSUES LOOM LARGE FOR REFUGEE KIDS. THESE CAMBODIAN REFUGEES FACE THE CHALLENGES OF STARTING AT NEW SCHOOLS, WINNING ACCEPTANCE, AND STRUGGLING TO LEARN IN SPITE OF LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES.

Problems at Home

For this teenage refugee from El Salvador, family burdens make adjustment to a new country especially hard

My family problems are heavy to bear. My mother cries all night. I hold my little sister because she is scared and I try not to think about our father. He was shot before we left. I don't do my homework most nights because it is so sad at home, and I try so hard to help. Now I am repeating the tenth grade. I sometimes think I should drop out of school. I cannot keep up.

Sixteen-year-old Salvadoran girl quoted in Crossing the Schoolhouse Border, *by Laurie Olsen, California Tomorrow, 1988.*

A Clash of Values

Being a young refugee means living at the difficult intersection between old ways and new

My family has such set values and they hold to them strongly. They hold onto the old ways. It is very difficult to explain something to them about my life now. We end up always arguing—about school, religion, how I dress, what I can and can't do. They even get mad at me for arguing. They say I shouldn't talk back. I hate my family. We fight all the time.

Sixteen-year-old Cambodian girl quoted in Crossing the Schoolhouse Border, *by Laurie Olsen, California Tomorrow, 1988.*

My Name Is Hope

A vivid description of day-to-day life for a displaced twelve-year-old girl in Azerbaijan

My name is Umid which I have learned in English means hope. I am twelve. But hope is very hard; even my dreams are bad.

I am from the town of Kalbajar in the beautiful Karabakh mountains. We can still see the mountains. Last winter we had to leave our home because the soldiers were attacking our town. I miss home very much.

This place where we have been for two years is terrible, and I think about running away, but I am too scared to leave my mother. We live in a big building with lots of small rooms that used to be for the workers of a collective farm. We have to share one room with two other families. My mother says there are over 3,000 people here altogether. There are a lot of children to play with, but we hardly have any toys. We try to make balls to play soccer. I miss listening to music and drawing.

The worst part is the bathroom, because there aren't any! There were a few toilets in the building but they are all broken now. I try to wait until I am outside, but in the winter it is so cold, and I worry that some boys will see me. I have a crush on one boy, but I don't have any ribbons for my hair and we are always dirty.

Another worst part is school. I really miss my school and the nice classroom we had. We have to walk a long way to the next town to go to school and they keep us all in a different classroom from the other children. My mother says it is because our clothes are not as nice.

Twelve-year-old Azeri girl's story as told to Beth Verhey, a member of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 1994

LIFE FOR THIS YOUNG KURDISH REFUGEE IS NOT ONLY VERY DIFFERENT FROM OUR OWN, BUT VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE LIFE SHE ONCE LED IN HER VILLAGE IN IRAQ.

All Aboard for a Bright New Dawn

For a group of Cambodian orphans, "going home" means a first introduction to their own country

The Sisophan Express train rattles through the Cambodian darkness. In carriage No. 2, 31 children are sleeping on wooden seats, in hammocks and all over the floor—small bundles of blanketed humanity. On the roof are five armed Dutch soldiers serving with the United Nations, making sure that the children and some 1,600 other returning Cambodians get home safely.

When the children wake up, all those under 11 who were born in refugee camps will see Cambodia for the first time. That afternoon, the train will arrive in Phnom Penh, their new home. There UNHCR, with help from the Australian refugee organization AUSTCARE, has built a new orphanage to house them. The group makes up one large extended family, known as Krousar Thmey—or "New Family" in Khmer.

They became a family in a refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border. They are the children of the Pol Pot generation, those who lost their lives or their way during Cambodia's dark times. UNHCR estimates that probably 30 percent of the Krousar Thmey children aged between three and 16 are orphans in the true sense of the word. The others were abandoned or lost to their relatives as families broke down and scattered during the years of conflict. Others were handed from family to family, some sold into prostitution, and others recruited by armies.....

As the train winds its way through the Cambodian countryside toward Phnom Penh, the children sing, tell stories, and stare at the homeland many of them have never seen. But of all the returnees—and so far UNHCR has helped 300,000 people return to Cambodia—these children know above all what life after the refugee camp, their only home to date, will offer. They hunger for the freedom to walk as far as they want in any direction without encountering a barbed wire fence; for the chance at an education and a job; for a role in rebuilding their country. . . . They're children who have seen many things which most of us are spared. They adapt quickly. The biggest change is that they are no longer refugees. They are children of Cambodia.

From "All Aboard for a Bright New Dawn" by Robyn Groves, UNHCR's Refugees magazine, April 1993

The Lost Boys of Sudan

For these youngsters, joining the rebels means security and a chance to study

James Thon was ten years old when he and 300 other boys left their villages and families in southern Sudan to begin their astonishing journey.

For six years, across hundreds of miles of parched land and brutal warfare, these boys have walked from one refugee camp to another, searching for sanctuary. The boys have become virtual nomads, bombed out of their villages and later forced to leave temporary havens because of violent clashes between the Sudanese government and the rebels....

[The rebel leaders say that their organization] has rounded up more than 12,000 boys from across southern Sudan, moving them among Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya.... The rebels say the children are not soldiers drafted into the war but the future of southern Sudan....It was a harsh journey, crossing deserts, steep mountains, and zones of conflict... but James and other boys said it represented an opportunity to learn to read and write rather than fight....

[Today, the boys are back in Sudan in a camp at Natinga,] a village nestled in the foothills of a small mountain range in Sudan near the Kenyan border. The boys arrived in March with little more than the clothes on their backs....

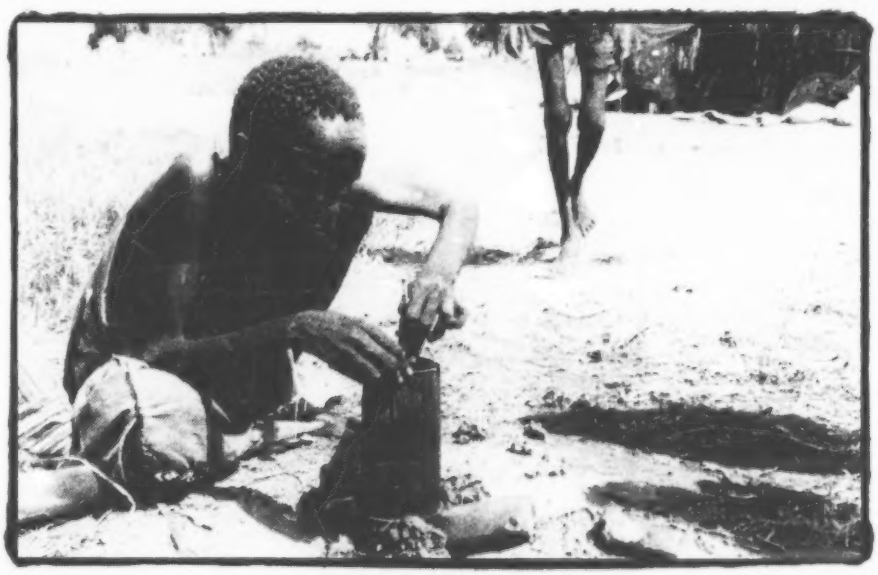
The Natinga camp resembles other refugee centers in the Horn of Africa, where families uprooted by war and famine try to live normal lives under extraordinary circumstances. But at Natinga, there are no mothers washing clothes, no sisters grinding sorghum, no wives carrying firewood on their heads.

Instead, there are boys everywhere, slapping wet clothes on flat rocks, scooping water from a tiny trickle in the bottom of a dried river bed, sitting under ancient mango trees poring over their daily schoolwork.

...Many of the boys have no idea where their families have gone. Most of the 12 million people of southern Sudan have been displaced at least once by the war....

Each day centers on schoolwork. With minimal supplies—one book for every 20 boys—the teachers tutor their students in the basics: English, mathematics, and writing, sometimes scratching arithmetic problems in the dirt with twigs when paper runs out....When strangers appear, the children do not ask for candy or money; they ask for pens and books.

From "The Lost Boys of Southern Sudan" by Judy Walgren, Africa Report, *May/June 1994*



THIS IS ONE OF THE "LOST BOYS OF SOUTHERN SUDAN," SEPARATED FROM HIS PARENTS AND CONSTANTLY MOVING FROM PLACE TO PLACE WITH 12,000 OTHER YOUNGSTERS.

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Using the accompanying maps, locate and fill in the names of the following countries: Azerbaijan; El Salvador; Cambodia; Bosnia-Herzegovina (in the former Yugoslavia); Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya.

2. Try to imagine having no school to go to. What would you miss most about it? What impact would having no opportunity to get an education have on your life?

3. Draft a letter to one of the refugee teens you've read about. Don't worry about making the letter a perfect composition. Think only about reaching out to this other person.

4. Do young Americans growing up in the United States have any of the same problems as these youngsters? What particular factors in young refugees' lives make their teenage years especially difficult?

This publication of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children's Schools Project is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.
Introductions written and stories edited by Ann Armstrong Craig. All photos supplied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER TEN

The Heart of the Matter

Refugees and Human Rights

Human rights

Fundamental rights regarded as belonging to all people. Codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.

Refugees the world over have one thing in common: they have fled their homes because their rights as human beings have been threatened or violated. But what do we really mean when we talk about ***human rights***? Jill Rutter of the British Refugee Council sums it up very clearly: "A right is something to which everyone is entitled. Rights that are laid down in law are called legal rights. But legal rights can change as the laws of a country change, and not all laws are fair. People also have moral rights—rights that reflect what is believed to be fair and just. Human rights are universal moral rights. They apply to all people at all times and in all situations."

In the eighteenth century, the American and French revolutions gave birth to several great human rights documents. The first was the American Declaration of Independence in 1776. Then came France's Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789. And on its heels came the American Bill of Rights in 1791, the very important first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

All three of these documents were influenced by the theory of *natural rights*. This was the idea that every individual enters society with certain basic rights to freedom, justice, and security that no government can deny or take away.

After the World War II, these basic rights were spelled out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United Nations General Assembly passed in 1948. (A simplified version of the Declaration appears in this chapter.) It's important to note that the Declaration doesn't grant rights directly to individuals. Instead, it establishes a set of universal standards that nations should observe in their treatment of their people. All countries that have signed the Declaration are under an obligation to uphold these standards.

And what if they don't? Though even the United Nations cannot force any country to uphold the rights of its people, various forms of international pressure (usually economic) can be exerted in an effort to bring about change. Organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty

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International play an important role in monitoring human rights all over the world and bringing human rights violations to international attention.

Families should never have to leave their homes because their government cannot or will not protect them—or worse, because its forces are actually abusing them. In this chapter there are first-person accounts from Bosnia and Guatemala that illustrate the meaning of "human rights violations" more clearly and poignantly than any formal definition can.

After these selections there is a poem by a young volunteer with the human rights organization Amnesty International. In it, she lets us know what it is like to hear refugees' painful stories of fear and suffering and yet have to tell some of them that they are ineligible for political asylum.

Let's Kill the Muslims!

An on-the-ground report of ethnic cleansing in the Bosnian village of Stupni Do

When the first mortar shell hit, 36 men of military age grabbed their hunting rifles and their few AK-47s and manned the bunkers they had dug along the edges of the village. But no one expected the ferocious artillery pounding that followed. Quickly overwhelmed, Stupni Do's defenders retreated to a couple of houses. There they spent the day trying to hold off 600 Croatian nationalists—and protecting the 100 women and children who huddled together in the basements of the two homes.

The "death platoon"—a group of 30 or 40 Croatian paramilitaries—entered the village and marched down its only main street. Dressed all in black, they hid their faces under camouflage grease or covered them with ski masks to conceal their identities. But many of the villagers recognized them—a policeman and former colleagues from the nearby town of Vares. "We used to work together," says Fatima Likic. "We were friends a year ago, and then six months ago they started to hate us." The platoon sang martial songs and began shouting "Let's kill the Muslims!" and "Where are all the pretty girls for us to rape? Bring them out!"

Then the killing started. "I could hear Ibrahim Likic and his wife, Jeva, screaming while they were burning alive in their house," recalls Zinata Likic, who hid in the basement of her house with her two infants and eventually escaped through the woods to the nearby village of Dabravine. During the night she heard two Croatian soldiers raping the woman next door. Another neighbor, she says, was raped by soldiers who forced her to comply by threatening to kill her family—and then did so anyway.

"People were begging, pleading, "Please don't kill us, we're innocent," says Alija Likic, who hid in a clump of trees just outside town, close enough to hear much of the butchery. "But they were saying, 'We're going to do to you what you've been doing to us'"—an apparent reference to a recent expulsion of Croats by Muslims in the village of Kopjari. With avenging fury, the Croatian death squad crushed the skulls of Muslim children, slit the throats of women, and machine-gunned whole families at close range. The next morning Croatian reinforcements finished up the job, torching all 52 houses and dynamiting the community's one small mosque. In less than 48 hours Stupni Do simply ceased to exist.

From "Let's Kill the Muslims!" by Rod Nordland with Tom Post, Charles S. Lee, Joe Brand, and Andrew Nagorski, Newsweek, November 8, 1993

THE SCENES OF VIOLENCE AND TERROR THAT DRIVE PEOPLE FROM THEIR HOMELANDS OFTEN LEAVE DEEP EMOTIONAL SCARS. IT MAY TAKE THIS YOUNG MAN A LIFETIME TO FORGET THE EXPERIENCES THAT HAVE MADE HIM A REFUGEE.

It's as If the Earth Swallowed Them Up

A mother mourns the disappearance of her son in Guatemala

He was a student of economics at the university. He was going to work; he left the house at two o'clock in the afternoon, but then he was taken by a group of heavily armed men. We know this from a boy who works waxing cars at the university. He was there, and he told us. Since then we have denounced this to the police; we've looked for him in hospitals, in all the detention centers. We even went to the morgue to look for him, but we've had no news of him. Yesterday it was eleven months since my son "disappeared"; we've tried every means to locate him. He was the sole support of our house; he left a little one of nine months old. It's not possible they just "disappear" people like that. It's just as if the earth opened and swallowed them up.

Guatemalan mother quoted in Guatemala: The Human Rights Record *by Amnesty International, 1987*

OFTEN THE SUFFERING DOES NOT END WITH RESCUE. IN HER FLIGHT FROM VIETNAM, THIS WOMAN HAS LOST HER CHILD, ADDING A MOTHER'S GRIEF TOTHE LOFF OF HER HOMELAND.

We Were Given Lists, and Then We Killed

A soldier describes the massacre of 500 Guatemalan villagers

When my group arrived in Cotzal Quiche, we participated with 500 other military police in a massacre of over 500 persons. We killed them in about 25 minutes. We were given lists, and then we killed. . . . My soldiers were uneducated. I cooperated because I did not want to go back to living by the machete on the farm.

We killed whole families, because it was what the military wanted, so it was necessary not to leave any heirs.

Frequently we went into a village posing as guerrillas and gave a talk. From a nearby private car, soldiers would notice who would cheer for us, and then other soldiers would come and grab the guerrilla sympathizers and either kill them there or on the road. . . .

I now hear the cries of children when I am walking alone. I remember those I just blew to pieces.

Guatemalan ex-Army sergeant quoted in Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad *by Penny Gordon and Michael McConnell, Orbis Books, 1986*

MOST REFUGEES ARE CHILDREN, YOUNG GIRLS, MOTHERS, AND GRANDMOTHERS. A LARGE NUMBER OF WOMEN REFUGEES HAVE BEEN THE VICTIMS OF RAPE AS WELL AS LOSS AND TERROR

MANY NATIONS, LIKE AZERBAIJAN AND ARMENIA, ARE BEING TORN APART BY BRUTAL ETHNIC CONFLICT. [INTERNATIONAL AZERBAIJAN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE]

A Simplified Version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 1. All people are born free and equal, and should behave with respect to each other.

Article 2. Everyone should have the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration regardless of their race, color, sex, nationality, religion, political opinion or social origin.

Article 3. Everyone has a right to live in freedom and safety.

Article 4. No one has a right to make people slaves.

Article 5. No one should be tortured, or punished in a cruel way.

Article 6. The law must treat everyone as people, not objects.

Article 7. Laws must not treat people differently because of their race, sex or way of life.

Article 8. Everyone has a right to legal protection if their rights are ignored.

Article 9. Nobody should be arrested, nor be kept in prison or sent away from their country, without a just reason.

Article 10. Everyone is entitled to a fair and public trial if charged with an offense.

Article 11. If charged with an offense, a person should be considered innocent until it is proved that he or she is guilty.

Article 12. A person has a right to privacy. No one has a right to say untrue and damaging things against another person.

Article 13. Everyone has a right to travel and live anywhere in their home country. A person also has the right to leave any country, including his or her own, and to return to it.

Article 14. People have the right to ask for asylum in another country, if they fear persecution. A person loses the right to ask for asylum if he or she has committed a serious nonpolitical crime, and has not respected the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 15. Everyone has a right to a nationality.

Article 16. Every adult person has the right to marry and have children. Men and women have equal rights in marriage, and if they divorce. No one should be forced to marry against his or her will.

Article 17. Everyone has the right to own property. No one can take other people's possessions without a fair reason.

Article 18. Everyone has the right to think and believe in what they want. This includes the right to practice a religion.

Article 19. Everyone has the right to express their thoughts, whether by speaking or in writing.

Article 20. Everyone has the right to organize peaceful meetings, and to form groups. But no one can be forced to join an organization.

Article 21. Everyone has a right to take part in the government of his or her country, whether by voting or being an elected member of parliament. Fair elections should be held regularly, and everyone's vote is equal.

Article 22. Everyone has the right to social security. This includes shelter, health care and enough money on which to live.

Article 23. Everyone has a right to work. Wages should be fair and enable a family to live decently. Men and women should receive the same pay for doing the same work. A person has the right to join a trade union.

Article 24. Everyone has the right to reasonable working hours, rest and regular paid holidays.

Article 25. Everyone has the right to a decent standard of living. Those who cannot work should receive special help. All children, whether born outside marriage or not, have the same rights.

Article 26. Everyone has the right to education. Primary education should be free and compulsory. A person should be able to continue his or her studies as far as he or she is able. Education should help a person live with and respect other people. Parents have the right to choose the kind of education that will be given to their child.

Article 27. Everyone has the right to join in cultural activities and enjoy the arts. Anything that a person writes or invents should be protected and the person should be able to benefit from its creation.

Article 28. For human rights to be protected there must be order and justice in the world.

Article 29. A person has responsibilities to other people. A person's rights and freedoms should be limited only so far as to protect the rights of other people.

Article 30. No government, group or person may ignore the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

From We Left Because We Had To: An Educational Book for 14-18-Year-Olds, *by Jill Rutter, British Refugee Council*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Como se Dice

The following poem was written by Melissa Jameson of Redlands, California. During the summer of 1990 she served as a volunteer with Amnesty International's Asylum Summer program in south Texas. As a volunteer she assisted asylum seekers and refugees in filling out forms and provided them with emotional support and empathy as well. The poem "Come se Dice" presents some of the realities she encountered working with asylum seekers and refugees from Central America.

How do you say
I'm sorry
the kind you use to say
I'm sorry your sister was disappeared
How do you word the question that asks
What type of torture
and for how long
and where
Today I learned the word for
the rubber hood, filled with powder that
burns your eyes and lungs until
you "confess" (say what they want to hear or
say anything to stop the fire
and blood in your throat)
that government interrogators use
How do you ask, again,
Who killed your father
What did they use
When did you discover his mutilated hands
Why did you leave your country
Who threatened you
How do you say
Where are your children?
How did they die?
Today I learned the word for
threaten
death
torture
body
rape
hide
escape
shoot
beat
hit
How do you say
Where did you go
after they raped you
after they killed your husband
after they kidnapped your son
Today I learned to say
I'm sorry
the kind you use to say
No,
We cannot take your case
I cannot help you.

by Melissa Jameson, from The Uprooted: Refugees and the United States *by David M. Donahue and Nancy Flowers, Hunter House, 1994*

OLD AGE PLACES AN ADDED HARDSHIP ON REFUGEES. THIS ELDERLY AFGAN REFUGEE, UPROOTED AND HOMELESS, MUST PROVIDE HIS OWN SHELTER AGAINST THE HARSH DESERT.

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Using the accompanying maps, locate and fill in the name of the following countries: Bosnia, Guatemala.

2. After reading the stories of the refugees in this section, link each of the human rights violations they have experienced to at least one article in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

3. "We Were Given Lists and Then We Killed" is by an army sergeant involved in the cold-blooded murder of hundreds of innocent civilians. What insight does this account give you into the thinking of those who give such orders and those who carry them out?

4. Summarize, in a brief paragraph of several sentences, what the author of "Como se Dice" is saying in her poem. What makes her indirect way of saying all this so effective?

5. Choose any one of the rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and explain the special meaning it might have for refugees. Support your choice with examples from any of the selections.

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Judy Mark
Schools Project Coordinator

Typesetting & Design by
David Ryer, Moonlight Design

For more information call:
(212) 551-3086

or write:
Women's Commission Schools Project
c/o International Rescue Committee
122 E. 42nd St., 12th Floor
New York, NY 10168-1289

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